THE NATION

NOVEMBER 19, 1960 . . 25c

# Fall Books

## Marquand and O'Hara

Louis Auchincloss

## *Current Fiction*

## New Trends and Old Hats

Terry Southern

## *The Doom Novels*

## A Slouch Toward Bethlehem

Marcus Klein

## Non-Fiction of World War II

Joseph Waldmeir

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# LETTERS

## Easy Way Out

*Dear Sirs:* That tearful lady with $1,000 whom Fred J. Cook describes as a horrible example of victimization by gambling ("Gambling, Inc.," *The Nation,* Oct. 22) turns out to be ripe Gorgonzola, straight out of "Ten Nights in a Barroom." If you really want to see a sad figure, you should have seen me right after I bought Pyrites of Poverty, Ltd., in the Canadian mine-stock market. But nobody has suggested raiding any stock exchanges. . . .

Mr. Cook proves what a great many already knew — that horse-racing is the biggest money sport in the country. But instead of hiring paid accusers to try to get convictions, why not legalize and tax this lush source of new money? Make it a state monopoly with civil-service people running the show, perhaps with an assist from the Internal Revenue Department. It is the only way to eliminate, with one stroke, every single evil listed in Mr. Cook's screed about gambling.

ARTHUR LOCKWOOD

*Ridgefield Park, N. J.*

[*Anyone who has suffered the buffetings of the mine-stock market is likely to look upon other types of gambling with a less jaundiced eye. But Mr. Cook demonstrates that you can't win at the race track either — even the legal, honest one; and he demonstrates, further, that the crime rate rises, and most normal business declines, wherever gambling is legalized (see "Gambling, Inc.," pages 308 ff., Oct. 22 issue). — Ed.*]

## Moral Money

*Dear Sirs:* Fred J. Cook's splendid article on gambling [*The Nation,* Oct. 22] has earned him some kind of a medal. Since, however, chauvinism takes precedence over patriotism in these cold-war motivated times, Mr. Cook will just have to be content with having his article read over and over again. I have already passed my copy of that week's *Nation* on to six other people.

I offer only one sour note: in the form of a question, though, and not in any way critical of Mr. Cook's article. Where is the line drawn between immoral money and moral money? How much *less* moral or corruptive is gambling money than, say, "speculating" money, or stock market money, planned-obsolescence money, vicuna money, deep-freeze money, etc.?

One may argue that moral money does not corrupt to the extent that immoral money does—that murders, gang wars, narcotics peddling, prostitution, etc., are derivatives of immoral money. When nuclear weapons and armaments in general constitute so great a percentage of our moral money—without which it is questionable (or at least unproven) whether the underworld *or* overworld could survive—I for one wonder if any line can be drawn at all.

ROBERT E. REARDON

*New York City*

[*Copies of "Gambling, Inc." are available at the following prices: 1 copy, 50c; 10 for $4; 50 for $17.50. Write to* The Nation, *333 Sixth Ave., N. Y. 14, N. Y.*]

## We Didn't Say 'Jr.'

*Dear Sirs*: After complaining of the dishonest I. Q. programs of the TV industry, you state in your November 5 issue (with some sarcasm) that "The ship of state has lifted her keel from the rocks of false encyclopedism, and sails in the calm roadstead of Maverick. . . ."

Well, what's wrong with that?

MAURY MAVERICK, JR.

*San Antonio, Tex.*

## Genteel Non-Conformity

*Dear Sirs*: In his "Medical Ethics and the Cold War," published in *The Nation* of October 29, Dr. Victor W. Sidel does not identify the psychiatrist involved in the Mitchell case, nor is it revealed that Mitchell did not see the psychiatrist as a patient, but as an expert with whom he could discuss his own theories on psychiatry. Hence, from this relationship, the psychiatrist could rationalize his revelations to the House Committee on Un-American Activities on the ground that there was no confidential relationship between patient and doctor. The Directory of Medical Specialists indicates . . . that the psychiatrist involved was certified as a specialist in his field in 1956. He is, therefore, relatively young in his field and could be more vulnerable to pressure than one who was more firmly rooted economically. . . .

What about medical ethics themselves? . . . Could it be that ethics in medicine, law or the ministry reflect the socio-economic relationship of society? And if society is threatened (as Dr. Sidel touches upon lightly, and from the other pole: in the case of the German physician under the Nazis), where the ethics? Dr. Sidel speaks of conscience and ethics (that word again) taking precedence over law. But I thought that Dr. Sidel said that lawyers, like ministers, have a privileged relationship which *has been recognized and protected by* law! . . .

To me, all this is symptomatic of our time: challenge conformity, but . . . in a genteel way, in birds-and-flowers exposition rather than the one-syllable, four-letter word.

HARRY E. BELLER, M.D.

*Miami, Fla.*

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NEW YORK, SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 1960
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THE NATION

# EDITORIALS

## Mr. Kennedy's Opportunity

A man may aspire to the Presidency for a number of reasons — ambition, vanity, love of country, love of power, a sense of responsibility, and so on. But, whatever his motives, he cannot justify them, even in the privacy of his own mind, unless he is resolved to promote the welfare of a majority of his fellow Americans and the long-range interests of the country as well as he can. In short, he must take his oath of office literally if he is to succeed, in his own estimation and the verdict of history. This opportunity Mr. Kennedy now has, and to a degree shared by few of his predecessors. A majority of his fellow citizens, taking him at his word, have avowed their receptivity to the basic idea of dynamic progress and the subsidiary ideas needed to make it a reality. They have repudiated the essentially static philosophy of the Republican Party and embraced new leadership. Not only new, but young leadership: Mr. Kennedy is the youngest man ever to be elected to the office. He symbolizes the rise to power of a new generation. He will exercise the powers of office with a Legislative and Executive branch of his own party. He has the benefit of advisers whose intellectual caliber is notably higher than that of President Eisenhower's subordinates and friends. He can afford, also, to be above all considerations of personal interest and respect for wealth as such: he is wealthy in his own right and, in due course, will inherit more wealth than any President before him.

No one ever assumed the office under brighter personal auspices or with a finer opportunity to cope with its enormous difficulties. This opportunity began on the morning after the election; when the President-elect awoke from dreams to the reality of his situation, his first resolution should have been to forget the political garbage of a sorry campaign and to resolve to deal with the problems of the United States in adult fashion. The policy changes which under the American electoral methodology could not be debated, did not on that account disappear; they must soon be faced. The evasions and distortions which both candidates employed to seduce what Senator Robert A. Taft invidiously referred to as the "stenographer vote," must now give place to hard thinking and courageous action. Mr. Kennedy not only can afford to be courageous now; he cannot afford to be anything else. Mr. Kennedy is intelligent and energetic; probably these considerations are clear to him. If so, he should have a successful administration. *The Nation*, which has seen many Presidents come and go, wishes him godspeed on a journey perilous to him and to all of us.

**Analyzing the Results**

*In next week's issue of* The Nation, *Louis H. Bean, economist, political analyst and author of* How to Predict Elections, *will analyze the results of last week's "cliffhanger" vote. If you are not a* Nation *subscriber, and your local dealer does not handle* The Nation, *you may order your copy by mail from us, enclosing 25c.*

## Losses and Gains

Both ideally and as a practical matter, a campaign should enlighten the voters — provided the objective is the welfare of the country. The Presidential campaign just past fell far short in this regard, in what the candidates said and in what they left unsaid, and in the tactics they used and countenanced. But there were also some notable gains.

One was the further deep dent made in the one-party

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system in the South. The beneficiaries of the system may repair some of the damage, but it will not be quite the same again. Despite the fact that Mr. Kennedy carried a number of Southern states, he is not the bondsman of the Dixiecrats and, as a political realist, he is not likely to reward the Quislings in his party. The defecting Dixiecrats should not receive so much as a single fourth-class postmastership from the President-elect, who has few past favors to pay for and little expectation of new ones. The Dixiecrats who lined up for the Kennedy-Johnson ticket in the end did so not out of loyalty to the Democratic Party but because they had become convinced its nominees would win.

In the future, the influence of the Dixiecrat element will decline relative to the influence of the liberal South, including the growing political strength of Southern Negroes. Mr. Kennedy intervened — showing imagination and courage—in the Martin Luther King, Jr., case where a Georgia judge had revoked the Rev. King's probation on a traffic violation and sent him to the state penitentiary. In fact, Robert Kennedy's direct communication with the judge was improper, but the uproar which might have been expected failed to develop. Segregation is losing ground, and Mr. Kennedy helped. The Negro now knows that his interests lie with the Northern, liberal wing of the Democratic Party.

Another development which may assuage the frustration of liberals is that the Catholic bugaboo has been laid, once and for all. Like racial segregation, which it resembles in kind, it was a disgrace to the country. Its dissolution will add to America's international prestige and lift a burden from its conscience. Mr. Kennedy met this issue head-on, frankly, logically and courageously, and by all indications he gained more votes than he lost.

The Roman Catholic Church came out ahead, not only because the outcome demonstrated that a qualified Catholic could be elected, but because the clergy and laity alike behaved with notable wisdom and restraint. One instance was a pronouncement by Msgr. Franklyn J. Kennedy, editorial manager of the *Catholic Herald Citizen*, which is published weekly by the Archdiocese of Milwaukee and the Dioceses of Milwaukee and Superior. Despite much urging, the *Herald Citizen* refused to support either candidate. "We are confident," said Msgr. Kennedy, "that our readers would think it highly improper for a Catholic paper — published under the direction of one Archbishop and two Bishops — to come out in favor of one candidate over the other." And in Puerto Rico, where the bishops overstepped their proper bounds, they were deservedly rebuked by the Catholic electorate — and again the Church gained, although the bishops did not.

Finally, the press as a whole, while largely supporting Nixon editorially, gave the Democrats a fair break in its news columns. The Democrats are reported to feel that they received the fairest press treatment of recent decades. Some of the interpretive journalism was not only fair, but brilliant. Whatever redounds to the credit of the press redounds to the credit of the country; let us hope that the gain will be held.

## Are We Training Cuban Guerrillas?

Fidel Castro may have a sounder basis for his expressed fears of a U.S.-financed "Guatemala-type" invasion than most of us realize. On a recent visit to Guatemala, Dr. Ronald Hilton, Director of the Institute of Hispanic-American Studies at Stanford University, was told:

> *1.* The United States Central Intelligence Agency has acquired a large tract of land, at an outlay in excess of $1,000,000, which is stoutly fenced and heavily guarded. Dr. Hilton was informed that it is "common knowledge" in Guatemala that the tract is being used as a training ground for Cuban counter-revolutionaries who are preparing for an eventual landing in Cuba. It was also said that U.S. personnel and equipment are being used at the base. The camp is said to be located in Retahuleu, between Guatemala City and the coast.
>
> *2.* Substantially all of the above was reported by a well-known Guatemalan journalist, Clemente Marroquin Rojas, in *La Hora*, a Guatemalan newspaper of which he is the director. His article appeared in violation, it is said, of a Government prohibition against any public discussion of the matter.
>
> *3.* More recently, the President of Guatemala, forced to take cognizance of the persistent reports concerning the base, went on TV and admitted its existence, but refused to discuss its purpose or any other facts about it.

The American press — even media with accredited correspondents on the scene — has apparently remained unaware of the public commotion the subject has aroused in Guatemala. Not even President Ydigoras' TV statement that a secret base exists has been reported in the United States, so far as we know. We ourselves, of course, pretend to no first-hand knowledge of the facts; nevertheless, we feel an obligation to bring the subject to public attention. If Washington is ignorant of the existence of the base, or, knowing that it exists, is nevertheless innocent of any involvement in it, then surely the appropriate authorities will want to scotch all invidious rumors and issue a full statement of the real facts. On the other hand, if the reports as heard by Dr. Hilton are true, then public pressure should be brought to bear upon the Administration to abandon this dangerous and hair-brained project.

There is a second reason why we believe the reports merit publication: they can, and should, be checked immediately by all U.S. news media with correspondents in Guatemala.



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Meanwhile, Dr. Hilton informs us that he will publish additional details of his findings in Guatemala in the November issue of the *Hispanic-American Review*, published by the Institute of which he is the director. The sooner the truth emerges, the better for all concerned — the United States, which now stands accused; the Cubans, who assert fear of an imminent invasion, and the Guatemalans, who appear to be thrust into a perilous quarrel not of their making.

## More Blessed to Receive

Among the multitude of problems which beset the United States, two related ones are most troublesome. Paul Heffernan, a financial writer of *The New York Times*, asks in that paper where the $6 billion in monetary gold which the United States has lost since 1948 has disappeared to, and who is to help Uncle Sam pick up the tab for aid to the underdeveloped countries. The answer to both questions is the same: West Germany. In 1948, when the rescue operation in West Germany was well under way, the formerly erring, but free and capitalistic country, had no gold reserves. She was in debt to the ears. Now this showcase of free enterprise, her debts forgiven by her former enemies, possesses $6.5 billion in gold. The transfusion has become painful to the donor, but the West German financial interests are happy. The debt capital forgiven by the United States is being loaned out at high interest rates — 6 per cent in Greece, for instance. "So go the incredible financial miscarriages of the postwar period," writes Mr. Heffernan. "The war victor pays reparations to the loser by forgiving debt. The loser lends out the forgiven debt capital in the land he ravaged. The victim of the ravagement pays 6 per cent interest to the war ravager for the use of capital donated by the war victor." And the loser gorges himself with gold siphoned off from the victor.

When the technically victorious Uncle Sam humbly asks the victorious loser for help, he is sternly rebuffed. Chancellor Konrad Adenauer protests that he cannot afford to tax the West Germans in an election year, and he always has an election year coming up, or the danger of a recession, or some other impending calamity. Later this month, Secretary of the Treasury Robert Anderson and Under Secretary of State Douglas Dillon will travel to Bonn to present their petitions to the Chancellor in person. They may even threaten to slash local purchases of supplies for U.S. troops stationed in Germany, or to send home the families of U.S. servicemen. To reduce the occupation troops, of course, is unthinkable; everyone knows that West Germany would immediately be overrun by the Russian hordes. It is safe to predict that the lame-duck Secretaries will get little satisfaction from the perpetual Chancellor, although it is not ruled out that he may throw them a symbolic bone or two so that they will not have to go home conspicuously empty-handed. But the job of getting the affluent West German capitalists to shell out is a job for President Kennedy, and good luck to him.

## The Resurrection of Valkyrie

When the B-70 bomber was "cut back" by the Administration of "Old Infantryman" Dwight Eisenhower last January, the howls of the Air Force and the prime contractor, North American Aviation, resounded through the land. Thousands of subcontractors and the West Coast newspapers joined in the outcry. The B-70, christened *Valkyrie* by North American, was to fly at three times the speed of sound at an altitude of 70,000 feet; it was the darling of the World War II generals of the Air Force. *The Nation* was not greatly impressed, however, for 2,000 miles an hour is still only a fraction of a ballistic missile's speed; what was even more to the point, the aircraft could not be ready for action until 1965 or later — probably later. The Old Infantryman seemed to have a pretty good case, as long as one did not happen to own airplane stock or have some other partisan interest in the matter.

The decibels of protest were such, however, that *The Nation* remarked that *Valkyrie* might have life in her yet, and so it has turned out. Eight days before the election the Old Infantryman relented and shelled out $265 million in fiscal 1961 funds to permit construction of two combat-equipped B-70s, as well as the two stripped models originally allowed for. The decision was immensely popular in Southern California, where unemployment in the air-frame industry is a major headache. A four-day market rally was set off in Wall Street in the stocks of North American Aviation and some of its major subcontractors (G.E., Westinghouse, I.B.M., etc.). One who did not join in the chorus of rejoicing was Jack Kennedy. Although Democratic sentiment had favored *Valkyrie* and her anguished sponsors, and the Democratic-controlled Congress had increased the Old Infantryman's $39.2 billion defense budget by $662 million, Mr. Kennedy assailed the Administration for a "transparent political maneuver to increase Republican votes."

Well, the votes weren't quite enough, and Candidate Kennedy will soon be President Kennedy. If the resuscitation of *Valkyrie* was a "transparent political maneuver," should she not, in fairness to the taxpayers, now be taken out of the iron lung from which, in any case, she will probably never emerge? She is little more than a set of plans on paper (and some not even on paper). By the time this prodigy of the Air Force can become a weapons system, missiles will have made aircraft obsolete. Here is one of the items that belong on the President-elect's crowded agenda.



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# FALL BOOKS

## New Trends and Old Hats

### *Terry Southern*

THE CULT of *bigness*, in its various attitudes, is by now a well-annotated American disease of which most symptoms and many causes appear to be fully understood. This sickness, however, as it applies to that brief lamplight called "contemporary literature," does not derive, as is generally supposed, from the great Victorian plague. It stems from aborted notions of Joyce and *Moby Dick* — sources of influence to be celebrated solely (should one judge by the content of our current fat serious novels) for their use of prefatory quotes and their bulk.

And yet the truth is that regardless of how warm or high the promise and ceremony with which it is weighed out, ten pounds of bear-grease (to extend a metaphor of Anthony West's) can never really equate to a drop of royal-jelly. Here then the first, perhaps terrible, confrontation: how many people can even know what royal-jelly is? or, knowing, not suspect its properties? In short, for how many, rich and poor, is a life-long diet of bear-grease irrevocably in the cards?

The bloated format of our novels is most usually a panicked attempt to bolster the otherwise rather shaky impression that anything worth saying is being said; like the meandering speech of a lying man who must talk about anything under the sun except the crime itself. It also has to do with the basic *merchandising* problem of the publishing business; "the industry is geared," as they say, "to handle a four-dollar product," so the novelist is pressured into conforming to a wholly artificial format. And that this should be for the sake of futilely resisting (from the industry's point of view) the inevitable transition from hard cover to paperback (where the requirements are not so inflexible) makes the fatness of these novels all the more distasteful.

Even the work of authors who show an excellence of skill and spirit sufficient to clear them of this sort of base weakness is inflated by the contagion of bigness. The latest novel of Wright Morris, *Ceremony In Lone Tree*, is a good example. Here he has created an extremely interesting situation: a solitary old man is living on in an abandoned town, long after all the other inhabitants have left; it is the story of his daily life there, and of a reunion of some of the former residents on his ninetieth birthday. The situation is a curious, freakish one; it is a highly *creative* situation, because it is immediately open to every potential: surrealistic, introspective, symbolic — many of which are realized. But why has Wright Morris appropriated 304 pages for a story to which no European writer could, in all taste and conscience, devote a third as many? Mr. Morris has written twelve novels since 1945, a fairly professional average for a writer who is not merely professional. All of his work has that certain "seriousness" of intent and "idiosyncrasy" of style characteristic of authors whose preoccupations lie elsewhere. That he would choose then to mutilate a beautifully simple and engaging situation by stretching it into a book longer than *The Stranger* and *Miss Lonelyhearts* put together was not a decision based on insecurity or possible sales. To understand it, as indeed to understand it in the case of the other books listed above—which, with one exception, are of a length even more wildly disproportionate to their substance than Mr. Morris' book — one must consider the essential difference between American and European literature. And this might best be described as the difference between *idea* and *idiom*. The European writer who seriously approaches his career does so in much the same way he would prepare for any other profession: by diligent study of what has gone before. His exclusive concern is the *treatment of themes*; this is not a *literary* consideration, but a *philosophical* one, because here it is the question of idea which is paramount. When at last he sets pen on paper—other than in *exercise du style*—he is familiar with the existing treatments of all themes, both grand and minor. His mind has become some kind of fantastic mechanical thesaurus: mention a *theme*, that is to say a formalized idea — from "abortion" to "Zionism" — and, on the lighted and well-anchored board of his mind's eye, giant selection wheels start to revolve, columns appear, slots fill, and across that board, like credits on a screen, pass all the ways in which that particular idea has been composed and framed, from Homer to Genet. His own growth as an artist depends upon what new context he is able to provide for existing themes, and not, like the American, upon the discovery of *new* themes — because for the European writer there is no such possibility.

THE American, on the other hand, becomes a writer when, as Nelson Algren says, "there is nothing else he can do." He stumbles onto the profession, and then he stumbles onto the *idiom* — that is, he moves along without conscious direction, getting caught up, repeatedly and intensely, by a particular vernacular, a particular attitude, a particular scene or milieu, and then simply reporting it, aware in only the most abstract way that it could be significant in the sense of *idea*. This is as true of our heavyweights as it is of our deadwood. Certainly Faulkner and Hemingway are the paragon of example — writers whose approach to idea is emotional and instinctive: it is non-verbal in speech and it is non-expository in writing. People who have talked with these men or who have read

**Wright Morris**
*Ceremony in Lone Tree*. Atheneum Publishers. 304 pp. $4.

**Herbert Gold**
*Therefore Be Bold*. Dial Press. 256 pp. $3.95.

**James Purdy**
*The Nephew*. Farrar, Straus and Cudahy. 210 pp. $3.95.

**John Barth**
*The Sot-Weed Factor*. Doubeday & Co. 806 pp. $7.50.

**William Styron**
*Set This House on Fire*. Random House. 507 pp. $5.95.

**William Goyen**
*The Faces of Blood Kindred*. Random House. 167 pp. $3.50.

**John Updike**
*Rabbit, Run*. Alfred A. Knopf. 307 pp. $4.

*TERRY SOUTHERN is the author of* The Magic Christian (*Random House*) *and* Flash and Filigree (*Coward-McCann*).



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them closely know that they have neither the inclination nor capacity for the pure ratiocination devoid of both personality and cultural values that is common to the most highly evolved European writers. One would be hard put, in fact, to find two writers with less training, in the European sense, for their work than these, our most lauded contemporaries.

In terms of attitude, somewhat the same may be said of Henry Miller, whose literary influence is now probably greater than either Faulkner's or Hemingway's, for although his work deals very much and very directly with ideas, it scorns the classic programmatic approach — to the extent, for example, that he wrote (with Michael Frankel) a two-volume analysis of *Hamlet* beginning: "I have never read *Hamlet* . . . ," an opening which would doubtless have snapped Sainte-Beuve's lobe, and yet the work is surely one of the most penetrating ever written on the subject. In fact, if one follows the textbooks it is apparent that what has most distinguished "serious" American literature, from Cotton Mather up through the milestones of Fenimore Cooper, Whitman, Wolfe, Saroyan, Kerouac, etc., has been its intuitive approach against a backdrop of innocence, though always extremely positive, like a cheerful folk song. Major work which has been the exception — where *idea* dominates *idiom* — such as in that of Poe, James and Eliot,* is readily identified, even along with its authors, as belonging to Europe. Even the very strong work which has been held to treat ideas — that of Dreiser, O'Neill and Sinclair Lewis — can be seen in this context as actually limited to instinct and idiom.

IN TERMS of the general level of the work itself, such a limitation cannot be without severe disadvantages. The European writer, for example, almost never makes a complete fool of himself with the intrusive self-laceration also typical of our own "serious" novels — the nostalgia, romance and other wholly negative qualities of which make for precisely the opposite of "serious." This form of negation, lacking even the discipline of cynicism, is the "seriousness" of a child in a tantrum. In its blindness to the actual terms of existence, and in its disregard for the creative possibilities of personal imagination, it reflects the ego of a puppy and the morality of a sieve.

And yet, viewed in another light, this notion that our writers, or at any rate the good ones, take up their trade merely because there is nothing else open to them, is similar to the fact of American Negroes becoming athletes and musicians—in that when the work is good it is very good indeed. This is because, untrained, they do not know how to follow; unschooled, they do not know what to copy; they know only that they have got to make it with this one possibility; so, in the combination of drive and self-reliance, they are apt to come up with something new.

The recent monstrous novel of John Barth, for instance, *The Sot-Weed Factor*, could scarcely have been written by a European, because it involves a *new* concept rather than a variation on an existing one. This is probably the longest work (due to its oversize pages and small type) of comparable seriousness to appear since Elias Canetti's *Auto-da-Fé* — a work of similar inspiration, though one generally considered unacceptable to the average reader because of its Kafkaesque flavor. What we have in *The Sot-Weed Factor* is an achievement somewhat on the order of getting a story published in the *Saturday Evening Post* which *should* have been published in *Weird Tales*. Or, seen in another way, there are passages in Bach about which eminent musicologists argue as to whether the mood is joy or sorrow. *The Sot-Weed Factor* appears to have this same sublime flexibility. It presents itself as a "historical novel," or again, as a "joke on historical novels," and each guise is strong enough that the work may be, and is, read as either. It is also, like *Finnegans Wake*, a proof of what cannot be done, or else the reason for no longer doing it; theoretically at least, the existence of *The Sot-Weed Factor* precludes any further possibility for the "historical novel." This does not mean that the book is one to be especially recommended; readers familiar with the extraordinary art of Mr. Barth's earlier novel, *The End of the Road*, will probably find *The Sot-Weed Factor* prolix and overwhelmingly tedious. This is, of course, an integral part of the book's destructive function, as is its prohibitive price ($7.50) and its grotesque length — sections of which seem designed, specifically, to *bore one to tears*; Mr. Barth's sense of humor, in short, is an extremely advanced one. *The Sot-Weed Factor* is perhaps more a literary event than a book, and it should be approached warily.

ANOTHER writer who has the devil's own mischief on his side is James Purdy. In *The Nephew* we are brought into the suburban home of an eighty-year-old couple, brother and sister, who are about as interesting as Ma Perkins and her friend Shuffle. It is, in fact, as though Beckett's *Endgame* had been adapted for soap opera, with the setting changed to a quiet tree-lined street in Des Moines. One is very nearly suffocated by the opening pages of a dray-horse gentility, and then, on page 21:

> Sometimes, after they had done battle together, as they had tonight, he would hear her later furiously breaking wind in her bedroom. . . .

Here we have a genuine surprise; it is an instance of the difference between the creative and the merely literary. That which is merely literary can achieve surprise only within its own predetermined framework: i.e., a son may "unexpectedly" murder his father, or the heroine-saint may suddenly be revealed as some kind of sex-nut — anything, in short, that has already been done by Shakespeare or Dostoevsky. But the genuinely creative surprise goes beyond the immediacy of character or event; what it does to *The Nephew* on page 21 is to wreck the entire structure of the story up to that point, by giving it a new and intolerable (on its previous terms) dimension. This is much more like *life* than it is like *literature* because it involves change or growth of the whole rather than the part; and that such changes are apt to be abrupt, uncontrollable, and even somewhat mysterious, is recognized by all but the very young.

Mr. Purdy, like Mr. Barth, has a highly developed and often deceptive sense of the absurd; his work continues to show an intense fidelity to his own particular perception of things, and whether or not this assumes a too highly personal form for most tastes, it is none the less upon this kind of alliance that any strength of American writing depends. No novelist, and especially no American novelist, can profitably pursue literature — life is the only quarry.

At the conclusion of *Therefore Be Bold*, the new novel by Herbert Gold (who, somewhat earlier, gave us *The Man Who Was Not With It*), is an italicized note reading: *Begun in Paris 1950/and Cleveland 1952/and Port-au-Prince 1954/and Detroit 1956/Com-*

*The work of Henry James does not really qualify as an exception; it may be included in the sense that it is not *representative* of American literature; this is, however, merely because James went farther afield in his infatuation for idiom. Consequently, what appears as "ratiocination" in James is less cause than it is effect.



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*pleted in New York City, Ithaca, Salt Lake City, and Reno 1959-1960.*

Ever since publishers learned the sales figures of *Ulysses*, they have doted on this sort of thing — "Gives it *class*," they say. Actually, one may be reasonably convinced, out of respect for the author, that it was intended as a joke. Its strict unfunniness, however, necessitates discrediting it as such; it is, in fact, a good example of *literary* humor as opposed to genuine or *creative* humor.

## Home for Thanksgiving

I bring myself back from the streets that open like long
Silent laughs, and the others
Spilled into in the way of rivers breaking up, littered with words,
Crossed by cats and that sort of thing,
From the knowing wires and the aimed windows,
Well this is nice, on the third floor, in back of the billboard
Which says Now Improved and I know what they mean,
I thread my way in and I sew myself in like money.

Well this is nice with my shoes moored by the bed
And the lights around the billboard ticking on and off like a beacon,
I have brought myself back like many another crusty
Unbarbered vessel launched with a bottle,
From the bare regions of pure hope where
For a great part of the year it scarcely sets at all,
And from the night skies regularly filled with old movies of my fingers,
Weightless as shadows, groping in the sluices,
And from the visions of veins like arteries, and
From the months of plying
Between can and can, vacant as a pint in the morning,
While my sex grew into the only tree, a joyless evergreen,
And the winds played hell with it at night, coming as they did
Over at least one thousand miles of emptiness,
Thumping as though there were nothing but doors, insisting
"Come out," and of course I would have frozen.

Sunday, a fine day, with my ears wiped and my collar buttoned
I went for a jaunt all the way out and back on
A street car and under my hat with the dent settled
In the right place I was thinking maybe — a thought
Which I have noticed many times like a bold rat —
I should have stayed making some of those good women
Happy, for a while at least, Vera with
The eau-de-cologne and the small fat dog named Joy,
Gladys with her earrings, cooking and watery arms, the one
With the limp and the fancy sheets, some of them
Are still there I suppose, oh no,

I bring myself back avoiding in silence
Like a ship in a bottle.
I bring my bottle.
Or there was thin Pearl with the invisible hair nets, the wind would not
Have been right for them, they would have had
Their times, rugs, troubles,
They would have wanted curtains, cleanings, answers, they would have
Produced families their own and our own, hen friends and
Other considerations, my fingers sifting
The dark would have turned up other
Poverties, I bring myself
Back like a mother cat transferring her only kitten,
Telling myself secrets through my moustache,
They would have wanted to drink ship, sea, and all or
To break the bottle, well this is nice,
Oh misery, misery, misery,
You fit me from head to foot like a good grade suit of longies
Which I have worn for years and never want to take off.
I did the right thing after all.

W. S. Merwin

The book itself is also a purely literary endeavor — an eight-year salvage job, according to the note, and concerning the joys and tribulations of adolescence. It is a book which, in a child-centered culture like ours, should have no trouble finding a sizable readership merely by virtue of its genre; and there is no particular reason to anticipate that these readers will be disappointed.

Mr. Gold has published five novels and two volumes of short stories at the age of thirty-six, so that it must be assumed he knows what he is about. Still, considering some of his earlier work, one cannot but wonder if a book like *Therefore Be Bold* is not a mistake. Another such novel as this and Mr. Gold will have become a professional in every sense.

ANOTHER recent mistake, on a much grander scale, would seem to be the extremely long novel of William Styron, *Set This House On Fire*. If, as Camus said, the only really serious philosophical question to be pondered is *suicide*, then it is hardly too much to say that the only serious literary question is *communication*. In terms of art, this would of course mean communication of a highly individual order, something which would stem from unique and deeply personal impulse faithfully projected. The probabilities of response to the projected image are nothing more nor less than the risks of the whole undertaking, but the fact remains that unless the image is a genuinely personal one, the possibility of communication is ruled out in advance.

Mr. Styron's is an undeniably strong and individual talent; there is every indication that he crippled it in *Set This House on Fire* by writing from a literary orientation instead of from a personal one that would allow imagination free rein within a carefully disciplined framework of craftsmanship — and that would seem to be a fundamental responsibility for a writer of his status and opportunity.

The story itself, like the basic situation of *Ceremony in Lone Tree*, is curious and engaging, with fine possibilities for suspense, cross-purpose action and unusual character relationships; but again, as in the case of Morris, those possibilities are buried beneath superfluous matter — through which, only in the occasional passage, image and episode, is one's eye caught by something that glitters.

Mr. Goyen's book of stories, *The Faces of Blood Kindred*, should be of real interest to his devotees, if, probably, to few others. He is an author



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who represents literary orientation on a very high level: there is a silken, almost ephemeral, delicacy in his manner that is too reminiscent of James for it to be taken very seriously these days. This is unfortunate because the stories are often pervaded by a sense of mystery and terror that may well be unique to the work of this particular writer. There is no trace of humor in these stories nor, evidently, in Mr. Goyen's perception of things. Should he ever manage to introduce such an element, it might easily cause a breakthrough of the literary shell and into something all his own, which could well prove fascinating.

*Rabbit, Run* by John Updike is perhaps the most carefully written of the novels considered here; and it is probably the most wholly literary in the sense that it is a story which has been told and retold a dozen times: i.e., he whose fondest memory is of the game in which he scored twenty-eight points against Exeter shall surely come to realize the emptiness of self and modern life. It is that kind of work in which the ingredients (including three ounces of *earthy dialogue* and a heaping big spoonful of *compassion*) are consciously added as though preparing a small stew, and the canisters from which they are drawn are the past works of a hundred hands. But there is more to life than Literature, and surely there is more to creative literature than novels which suggest otherwise.

# Marquand and O'Hara: the Novel of Manners

## *Louis Auchincloss*

HORTENSE CALISHER once told me that, as a writer, she envied me my family. It was her idea that the layers and layers of cousins, concentrated in Manhattan and belonging to a tribe that had done business there for a century and a half, should be grist for any novelist's mill. And so it might have been, a hundred years ago, in a world where family meant something broader than parents and children and where nepotism was a fact and not a bogey. But today, when it is considered rather pedantic to emphasize any relationship more distant than that of first cousins, the different branches of a large family have little more in common than what everyone has in common, and what is that for a novelist?

Perhaps I should state that I am not hankering after any good old days. I have no desire to return to a New York where servants slept in unheated cubicles on the top of drafty brownstones, with an evening off every second week, and where W. A. Croffut, in his public eulogy of the Vanderbilt family, could describe the old Commodore as one "puffed with divine greed." But every writer has two points of view about the society in which he lives: that of a citizen and that of an artist. The latter is concerned only with the suitability of society as material for his art. Just as a liberal journalist may secretly rejoice at the rise of a Senator McCarthy because of the opportunity which it affords him to write brilliant and scathing denunciations of demagogues, so will the eye of the novelist of manners light up at the first glimpse of social injustice. For his books must depend for their lifeblood on contrast and are bound to lose both significance and popularity in a classless society.

SUCH great social novelists of the last century as Balzac, Dickens and Trollope attempted nothing less than a reproduction of contemporary society. Even Jane Austen, who limited herself to a village, described in *Emma* a goodly portion of it. Yet, however crowded and variegated their novels, the writers of the century share a common denominator of clearly defined class feeling. Usually it is the author's feeling against the class immediately above him in actual life. Those prickly governesses of the Brontë sisters, those impecunious daughters of Jane Austen's country gentlemen, those rural young men in Balzac and Thackeray whose purses are too small for metropolitan pleasures, those hungry curates in Trollope, may all glare resentfully up the social ladder, but they also stare rather condescendingly down it. One wonders if Victorian fiction could ever have attained its bulk without keeping its nose firmly buried in the rich trough of Victorian snobbishness. Not that barriers were impassable. The whole drama of Victorian fiction is just that they *were* passable. But you knew when you were passing.

If you made a fortune in the city and married a duke's daughter, everyone knew you were taking a great step. Nowadays any presentable young man may aspire where he chooses. He may fail, but he will not be considered presumptuous. The foreshadowing of the novelist's difficulties is seen in Trollope's *The Duke's Children*. In 1881, it was already not a sufficiently terrible thing for the son of the Duke of Omnium to marry an American to make a novel of it. One feels old Trollope's disgust both with the fact and the loss of subject matter.

But, of course, there was more than snobbishness at the base of the nineteenth-century novel of manners. There were all the things that go with snobbishness, or, rather, that go with the hierarchical society in which snobbishness is bred. There was fierce prejudice (or idealism, depending on the point of view); there was bigotry (or religiosity) and a passionate concern with the niceties of deportment and the chastity of women. The fiction of the era is peopled with fascinating extremists, magnificently logical and magnificently unjust, whose stubborn obsessions and murderous jealousies result in the most appalling catastrophes. Where would the English plot have been without the violently opposed marriage, or the French without the duel? Say what one will about sentiment and prolixity, it was still a pretty good show.

The public, anyway, loved it, and the public still does. It is a commonplace that the psychological novel, or the stream-of-consciousness novel, or the symbolic novel, has never enjoyed even a small fraction of the popularity of the novel of manners. The book clubs today clamor for a big meaty story about some phase of contemporary society, told from varied points of view and filled with graphic detail. Witness the sale of Allan Drury's study of the United States Senate, *Advise and Consent*. It is my simple thesis that the failure more generally to produce this kind of novel is not attributable to the decadence or escapism of mid-twentieth-century writers, but rather to the increasingly classless nature of our society which does not lend itself to this kind of delineation. I do not mean by this that we are any duller than the Victorians, but simply that the most exciting and significant aspects of our civilization are no longer to be found in the distance and hostility between the social strata.

JOHN P. MARQUAND was engaged in the Balzacian task of drawing a picture of contemporary American society through a series of fictional biographies. He gave us a good tycoon, a bad tycoon, a gen-

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*LOUIS AUCHINCLOSS is a lawyer and a novelist; his most recent novel is* The House of Five Talents (*Houghton Mifflin*).



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eral, a news commentator, a trust officer, a successful playwright, a Boston Brahmin of the old type and one of the new. Except for the Brahmins, the subjects are apt to be of middle-class New England origin—often from a town called Clyde in Massachusetts—and their past hovers over their heads, even in the days of their triumph, like a miasma. They are never free of the sense of social distinctions bred into them in childhood. Afraid of condescending and afraid of being condescended to, they are haunted by the idea that they have not alighted on just the right rung of the social ladder. Into their make-up goes a strange mixture of ambition and humility, with some of the drive of the parvenu and some of the resignation of an old English servant. When I think of them, I think of two characters, acquainted from boyhood, facing each other awkwardly over the gulf created by the success of one, as in *Women and Thomas Harrow*, when the local boy returns to buy the big house on the fashionable street and employs an old schoolmate to replant the garden.

> "Hello, Jack," Tom Harrow said.
>
> "Hello, Tom," Jack Dodd said. "You're looking good."
>
> There must have been some sort of reverse explanation of why he was pleased that Jack Dodd should call him Tom. He could never be wholly at ease with Jack Dodd or with others of his contemporaries there in town, when he could deal with people in any other place in the world adroitly, affably, and without the slightest sense of strain.

It is not a coincidence that the finest novel of a writer so obsessed with the problem of class consciousness should be concerned with the past. The late George Apley's dates are *1866 to 1933*, and he is born at the summit of a formidable Boston pyramid of classes which would have provided Trollope with as rich material as Barsetshire. We are shown the warping of Apley's character by the forces of property and position, we see him lose his early struggle for independence and the Irish girl whom he wants to marry, and we see him settle down at last in defeat to a life of bird watching, civic duties and the arid satisfaction of denouncing a new world. Yet for all his flag waving and for all his bitter prejudices, Apley remains a man of courage and a man of heart. His defeat is brought about by a wholly sincere veneration for the opposing forces. To have married Mary Monahan would have cost him the esteem of every human being whom he has been brought up to admire and disqualified him for the position of leadership that he believes it his duty to take up. The defeat of such a man holding to such a creed is not tragic but it is pathetic, and pathos has a bigger place than tragedy in the study of manners.

*H. M. Pulham Esquire* proves that the passing of a single generation has stripped the conflict of its pathos. Why should Harry Pulham (who might be Apley's son), a war hero, working in an advertising agency in New York, not marry Marvin Miles? His family might have frowned and criticized her dress and speech, but they would have come around soon enough. Such marriages were every-day affairs in the twenties, even in Boston. Pulham himself recognizes the change in the times when he assesses the social opportunities which his friend, Bill King, has passed up:

> Bill would actually have got on very well at Harvard, I think, if he had cared about trying. It was true that he did not have any connections, but if he had gone out for something besides the Dramatic Club, such as the Lampoon, or even the Crimson, and if he had bothered with the people to whom I had introduced him and who usually liked him, he would very possibly have made a Club.

We see what has happened. Bill King doesn't *want* a club, and Marvin Miles doesn't want Pulham. The shoe is now on the other foot. The trouble is that if Marvin doesn't want him, the reader isn't going to want him very much, either, for Marvin is a shrewd girl. Pulham's problem is not, like Apley's, that he is caught in the vise of a social system, but that he is endowed with neither humor nor imagination. It is a bit difficult to believe in a decorated war hero who is afraid to ask the family butler for an extra glass and so disclose to the world below stairs that the woman he loves wants a drink before dinner.

AFTER *Pulham*, Marquand was permanently struck with the problem of creating heroes who had to be strongly influenced by less and less influential environments and who at the same time would not strike his readers as Casper Milquetoasts. He solved it partially with the gentleman hero of the suburbs, a kind, earnest, patient man of an absolute but rather wearisome integrity, a faithful husband and adoring father, who plods through a dull life in a sleep-walking fashion, prodded by a nervous, suspicious wife who has invested her emotional being in local standards of success and is terrified that her house of cards will fall in if she allows her husband, even in joke, to question the least of her adopted values. Charley Gray in *Point of No Return* and Bob Tasmin in *B. F.'s Daughter* both fail with their first loves because they don't push hard enough, thus perhaps deserving the fate of being pushed about by their second. A few words uttered or held back might have turned the scales in Tasmin's relationship with Polly Fulton. Yet he moodily blames his ineptitude on his inheritance:

> I've always been a goddam gentleman, and I've always been afraid not to be one. Let's put it on my tombstone. That's my whole obituary.

In the later novels the function of each hero's elaborately described background becomes even fuzzier. What does that drug store in Vermont have to do with Melville Goodwin's wanting to be a soldier? And how does Willis Wade pick up the habit of sentimentalizing his motives and calling everything "lovely" in a bleak Yankee community like Clyde? Marquand seems to be tracing Willis' hunger for success to his family's move into the garden cottage on the great estate of the aristocratic Harcourts, a thoroughly Victorian situation. Bess Harcourt is as haughty as Pip's Estella, and poor Willis achieves his financial goal only to have her fling in his teeth a bitter Victorian epithet: "Get out of my way, Uriah Heep!" The moral seems to be that to such as Willis, the world of the fine old Harcourts, with its traditions of loyalty and integrity, will be forever closed. To such as Willis, yes. But why? Not because of his ambition or even his business methods, but because of his drooling sanctimoniousness. If he had faced Bess Harcourt boldly, like a John O'Hara hero, and flung in *her* teeth that he was closing down the Harcourt mills because they didn't pay, she would have rewarded him as O'Hara ladies reward such heroes. What she really condemns him for (and who wouldn't?) is that he reads the Harvard Classics fifteen minutes a day and boasts about it.

My favorite of the novels, after *The Late George Apley*, is *Point of No Return*, perhaps because it dramatizes just the point that I have been trying to make — that the paralyzing effect of a class-conscious background is largely illusory. Charley Gray can be liberated from Clyde only by returning there and finding that Jessica Lovell is about to save herself from middle-aged spinsterhood by marrying Jackie Mason, who was born further down the social ladder than Charley himself. The poor old past is now revealed to him in all its smallness and sterility, as sad and foolish as Jessica's neurotic, deluded father who once



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told Charley that money made on the stock market was not the same as inherited money. So Charley goes back to New York and the Stuyvesant Bank, strengthened in the discovery that his youth was dominated by puppets, and finds that the promotion of which he has despaired has been assured him all along, that his rival for the bank vice presidency has been as illusory as Clyde. His trip has had the effect of a psychoanalysis. But when the function of a character's background is only his misconception of it, the novel of manners has become a psychological novel.

I DO NOT wish the reader to assume that I think we have attained the classless society. I am aware of the plight of Negroes in the South and of the terrible differences that still exist between rich and poor in our large cities. But every sociologist comments on our enormous suburban white-color population and its habit of classifying the different strata of which it is composed by such artificial standards as number of automobiles or television sets. I do not deny that people can care passionately for such things or that their caring is a proper subject for a novelist, but surely it is thinner material than what the Victorians had to deal with. Today we have snobbishness, but it is not *class* snobbishness. It is the snobbishness of groups for other groups, like cliques within schools. Surely it engenders a different degree of resentments. Surely there is a difference between the resentment of the man who has not been asked to dinner and that of the man who has been thrown down the front stairs. What I find out of proportion in the novels of John O'Hara is the significance which he attaches to the former.

In the strange, angry world that he describes, the characters behave with a uniform violence, speak with a uniform crudeness and make no appreciable effort to control lusts which they regard as ungovernable. The most casual meeting between a major and minor character will result either in an ugly flare-up or a sexual connection, or both. It is impossible for an O'Hara hero to order a meal in a restaurant or to take a taxi ride without having a crude interchange with the waiter or driver. Even the characters from whom one might expect some degree of reticence — the rich dowagers, for example — will discuss sex on the frankest basis with the first person to bring the subject up. And in Gibbsville or Fort Penn the first person to bring it up is the first person they meet.

A great deal is said about each character's exact social position, perhaps because it is so difficult to determine it from his habits and conversation. Everyone does everything, and everyone knows that everyone else is doing it. But that does not mean that the shibboleths of an older society are dead. Far from it. The code of an earlier culture, though only dimly remembered, is superstitiously venerated. O'Hara's men and women dance around the Victorian traditions of class distinction and sexual restraint like savages around a cross left by murdered missionaries and now adorned with shrunken heads. The hatred of the immigrant who coughed his lungs out in a coal mine is kept alive in the hatred of the rich Irishman who can't get into the Lantenengo Country Club. And although the O'Hara hero knows that sexual liberty is now the rule, he clings to a dusky little hope that the magic of the marriage vow will somehow safeguard his spouse. Thus Robert Millhouser in *Ourselves to Know*, a man versed in the ways of prostitutes, who has married a nymphomaniac half his age with full notice of her vicious propensities, shoots her dead without a qualm when he discovers that she has been unfaithful.

FROM TIME TO TIME there emerges from the jungle a superman or superwoman, the darling of the author, to dominate the scene, such as Grace Caldwell Tate in *A Rage to Live* and Alfred Eaton in *From the Terrace*. They differ from their contemporaries in that they have a little more of everything — more sex appeal, more brains, more money, more social position. But, above all, they have more defiance. They look the universe in the eye and spit. They are defeated in the end of their chronicles, but only by accumulated envy; they have not been able to learn that the other beasts in the jungle cannot endure the sight of so many advantages. Grace Tate might have been able to live in Fort Penn with a husband, but as a beautiful widow she is hounded out of town as an unmated lioness is hounded out of the pride by the others of her sex. And Alfred Eaton, for all his brilliant capabilities, is condemned to a life of idleness because he is too plain spoken. The *hubris* of O'Hara's superpeople is not that they have offended the gods. They have offended the grubby little people who share their faults but resent their success.

If O'Hara were consciously trying to describe the chaos of a society where each individual flouts the moral code, yet applies it with brutal bigotry to his neighbor, and where the inhabitants of every town play at being masters and serfs



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like boys and girls in a school play, dressed up in wigs and hoops, he might be a more important novelist than he is. Surely it is a damning picture of the contemporary world. But my trouble is that what he seems to be doing, underneath all the violence and bluster, is to be writing an old-fashioned novel of manners where the most important item about any character is the social niche in which he was born. Each hero must start the race of life with a particular ribbon pinned to his lapel, and he will never be able to take it off, whether he be proud of it or ashamed. To O'Hara, in other words, it really seems to matter if he belongs or does not belong to the Lantenengo Country Club.

IF BACKGROUND is everything, background must be described in detail, and O'Hara's descriptions amount almost to inventories. A friend of mine, who was brought up in a Pennsylvania town similar to Gibbsville, assures me that these descriptions are remarkably accurate. But I question their significance. When I learn that Mary Eaton's father wore "pince-nez spectacles with small lenses, a blue and white polka dot bow-tie and a Tau Beta Pi key on his watch chain," that his "tan kid oxfords were polished and he had on black silk socks with a thin white stripe," I do not immediately realize that he is half businessman, half professor. I can think of too many lawyers and judges and doctors who might be guilty of the same combination. Nor do I really see the difference in Fort Penn between those who say "the Tates" and those who say "Sidney and Grace." Nor do I really believe that Mary Eaton's Rowland blood would make her "automatically acceptable" to anybody. When Grace Tate tells Roger Bannon that it would take her a lifetime to explain the difference between him and the men in the Fort Penn Club, I wonder if at the end of the lifetime he would know. But she teaches him more than she thinks with a single word:

> "A lady? What do you know about a lady? Where would you ever learn about a lady? Have you ever seen one? You contemptible son of a bitch, you wouldn't know a lady if you saw one."
>
> "Yes, I would. You're a lady, and probably you're acting like one."
>
> "Oh, balls."

When he takes for his hero a Gibbsville aristocrat of the old school, O'Hara, like Marquand with George Apley, writes his most successful novel of manners. Joe Chapin, in *Ten North Frederick*, is a man who has been brought up with high ideals (though this is largely blamed on a passionately posses-


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sive mother), and he is unique among O'Hara characters in that he seeks to live according to his own somewhat fuzzy conception of the old moral code. He is faithful to his wife, conscientious and high-minded in the practice of law and active in civic affairs. The tragic flaw in his character is an irrational desire to become President of the United States. Many men have been so obsessed, but few have suffered from Joe's peculiar delusion that he can attain his objective by the simple expedient of attending meetings of bar associations. The other characters are puzzled as to what Joe is up to and, indeed, it takes all the genius of Mike Slattery to guess it from the nature of Joe's activity. When Joe, in his late fifties, finally decides that the time is ripe to throw his hat in the ring, he offers Mike $100,000 for the nomination of lieutenant governor. Mike quietly pockets the money for the party, and Joe is left to drink himself to death. It is difficult to be sympathetic with a man so deluded, and it is not clear that Joe's ideals at the end are any higher than Mike Slattery's, but the contrast between the two men is always vividly interesting. We see Joe against a background of privilege and Mike against its opposite; we see the even greater disparity between their wives; we see Joe fumble, out-maneuvered, and fall into the clutches of his wily and contemptuously pitying opponent, and we learn more about the forces of the society that has placed the two in conflict than in a whole volume about polka-dot ties and fraternity pins.

WHEN I turn, on the other hand, to the defeat of Julian English, in *Appointment in Samarra*, I can understand it only in terms of a compulsion to suicide. Taken as such, the novel is certainly a powerful description of self-destruction, possibly one of the most powerful ever written. But again I am troubled with the nagging suspicion that this may not be what the author intends. Is Julian meant to be destroyed by himself or by Gibbsville? Does his instinct to antagonize lead him surely to the most dangerous persons, or is their envy of his looks, his breeding, his easy manner and apparent success what makes them hunt him down? Had Julian lived elsewhere than in Gibbsville, that lumber yard of chips on the shoulder, would he have perhaps survived? But these speculations are idle. Julian belongs to Gibbsville, and it is never difficult to find enough hate in Gibbsville with which to destroy oneself. From one end of town to the other the populace fairly throbs with hurt feelings. Al Grecco provides its motto as he drives through Lantenengo Street early Christmas morning and lowers the car window to shout out at the darkened homes:

"Merry Christmas, you stuck-up bastards! Merry Christmas from Al Grecco!"

Perhaps it is the motto of O'Hara himself and of the contemporary novel of manners.


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# The Tedious Autumn of Grandpa Solomon

## *Harvey Swados*

*Returning in 1959 to an old preoccupation with matadors, fiestas and the local delicacies of Spain, Ernest Hemingway and a party of friends toured the country in the wake of two great contemporary bullfighters who were appearing in a series of "matches" to determine supremacy. He describes the journey in the forthcoming* The Dangerous Summer *(Scribners), three chapters of which were published recently in* Life. *Hemingway's unslaked appetite for blood, manly affection and fried eels has moved our correspondent to recall the season he has just spent following two stylish gladiators through the autumn landscape of the United States.*

THEY SAY if you can stay away from American politics for a year you can stay away from it forever. I had tried, God knows, but here were the great debates coming up in the country I loved best next to my native Liechtenstein. I talked it over with trusted American friends who had fought on both sides of the Chicago Black Sox scandal (concerning which I had written a little thing that had earned me a Swedish prize) and they agreed that I might honorably return to America if I kept my mouth shut about sports and stuck to politics.

So we drove down, a little party of eleven of us, through Quebec and into Vermont. We were touring in two cars, a cinnamon Gatti-Casazza equipped with woofer and tweeter, and a Meneghini-Callas whose platinum roof rack bore our hamper of Cokes[1] and cheeseburgers[2], since we had been warned by well-intentioned friends that both delicacies had deteriorated in the U. S. in recent years. It struck me at first as an expedition just a touch presumptuous, but I soon came to find it terribly amusing to tool about with these two vehicles, both owned by a successful tenor friend with the unpolitical name of "Red" Smelton. It was that kind of year.

We ate and drank well, although our chauffeur, a beardless veteran of the Mille Miglia, the Monte Carlo Grand Prix, and the Soap Box Derby[3] refused to drink Cokes while he drove, arguing that the gas gave him double vision. But when we arrived at Vermont the weather was grim and so was our reception. The Immigration Inspector was chewing gum. This was customary but not reassuring. Through a series of happenings and events in the course of leav-

[1] Internationally popular beverage (pl.), its invention and secret formula claimed by America.

[2] Ground meat and melted cheese sandwich. American gourmets insist that cheese be placed atop and *not* underneath ground meat.

[3] Despite its title, a non-political, uninhibited annual fiesta in Dayton in Ohio, led by fearless youths careening downhill in homemade conveyances at breakneck speed. Author participated in several.



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ing and returning to Liechtenstein as well as in political trips to Monaco, Andorra and San Marino, I had overcome this instinctive fear of the uniformed man, as a personal problem, and had been able to communicate this to others.

Just the same I was uneasy because there was no reason for my wife to learn fear from these uniforms because of what I had written about the Chicago Black Sox, even though Sheba had been sensible enough to procure letters of introduction to the Chairman of the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee from the U. S. Ambassadors to El Salvador, Guatemala and Liberia (all partly owned by her father). So there was a little moment of truth when the Customs Inspector drew from our luggage a copy of my *Collected Works*, in the translation by K. C. (Casey) Knickerbocker, a burly young comic book writer of great gifts who had been in our lives for a long time, and who now stood solidly by my side. I had brought along a few thousand copies to barter for aged steaks and youthful rabbits[1], but there it was in his hand nevertheless, a uniformed hand. Those who have been in the hands of uniforms will know what I mean by a uniformed hand. It should not be mistaken by those with shaky English for an unformed hand, or *mano malformato*.

"Are you related to Grandpa Solomon?"

"I am of that tribe."

"You *are* Grandpa Solomon."

I drew myself up tight and hard in my Keds sneakers and extended my hand. "Get off my back, Jack," I replied, deliberately lapsing into the argot of the American man of letters. But he knew he had me through Sheba and Casey and Red Smelton, and he jammed a ballpoint into my outstretched hand. "Sign." He pointed to the flyleaf. "For my kids." When there are other lives involved, you turn stoic in a way that would hardly be thinkable if you were alone. I signed.

But now we were in America, and we drove hard and well, down through those marvelous New England rocks. At the ancient walled city of Albany we paused to eat well and talk well with Winsome Bankteller, a business associate of Red Smelton's, who took us all to a simple but manly lunch of the countryside in a cool, vaulted cave known as Fallout Spa. (It has since become infested with tourists from Eniwetok, the Marshalls, Siberia and the Sahara, but that is once again the inevitable story of the despoliation of a

[1] A playful Solomonic euphemism for American airline stewardesses.



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virgin area by the invading hordes. It is a depressing story but it is not my story and I am not going to make it worse by revealing the names of all the restaurants in which we ate well.) I was eager to discuss with Winsome his recent unsuccessful fishing expedition, but I had promised to steer clear of sports and so I asked him about the two politicians whom I was about to observe. He told me some of the damnedest things I ever heard, but I swore I would not reveal them, which is part of the reason why we remain good friends, and why the campaign that was to take place was so ruthless and terrible.

From there we roared south along the Thruway, pausing only to refresh ourselves at a restaurant named for Howard Johnson, an old eating partner of more carefree days, where we drank tea brewed in bags and ate frozen breaded shrimp in small baskets, as many delicacies are served in this proud and food-loving country.

So we arrived at the Palisades which were not good as they had been in 1919, they seemed to have shrunk somewhat, at least in my estimation, except for one thing which made it a historic moment. It was our first glimpse of the two candidates, Noxon and Candy, who were to meet mouth to mouth across this river and into the trees beyond, and who with their respective retinues were drawing up the ground rules. The Hudson Debate was to be followed by a Mississippi Debate and a Missouri Debate and I could not be neutral, partly because I had had some small part in the Lincoln-Douglas Debate and also because I had known Candy's grandfather and known him well, when he was young and working in politics with a controlled anguish and purity of line that were very emotional.

So I was biased in favor of Candy and I soon became convinced that he was truly the greatest, even though I knew all too well from my earlier intimacy with William Lemke that it can be dangerous to become too friendly with a politician when you know how good he is and how much you will have to lose if anything happens to him.

Noxon was naturally convinced that he was the greatest and it is true that in the course of his career he had been very suave indeed, often doing the truly dangerous thing with his opponents, and killing well. There was the money, too, but I do not think that that was all any more than it was simply the desire to impress the handsome oil men and beautiful movie actresses around him. Now here he was watching Candy coolly cutting up the commentators, some of whom did not want to fight, it is true, but others of whom charged blindly and died well, slipping in their own blood.

Noxon knew he was in for a Donnybrook[5] and the knowledge worked on him in a way that made him careless so that I was unhappy as you can be only when you have known and loved politicians, when he was tossed by an enraged commentator into the Hudson where he bled internally and then externally, exuding more blood than you would think or hope that a man's veins could hold.

Until now Candy had had things pretty much his own way, partly because he owned the entire east bank of the Hudson. He knew all too well that this was not going to be true of the Mississippi, if only because his grandfather had been outbid by a combine of Noxon's supporters. He knew, too, in the way that a politician will because he lives always with sudden death, that Noxon having been injured would be more daring than ever, and the knowl-

[5]Not to be confused with either flowing streams or Old Donnybrook, American beverage similar to Coke.


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## Landscape II

(*From the Italian of Cesare Pavese*)

The hilltop whitens toward the stars in open land;
thieves would be seen up there. Here below between the slopes
the aisles are all in shade. Up above where there's plenty
and the land belongs to men who have no troubles, nobody climbs:
here in the dampness on the pretext of going for truffles
they come inside the vineyard and plunder the grapes.

My old man has come upon two grape stems thrown
among his plants and tonight he grumbles. The crop's already short:
day and night in dampness nothing comes but leaves.
Between the plants at the line of the sky bare ground is visible,
daily robbing him of sun. Up there the sunlight burns
all day and the land is chalky: even in the dark you see it.
There no leaves come, the sap goes all to the grape.

My old man, leaning on a walking stick in the wet grass,
holds one hand clenched: If the thieves come tonight
he'll leap to the middle of the rows and break their backs.
People who deserve the treatment of beasts, they are;
besides, can they go telling about it? Now and then he lifts his head,
sniffing the air: out of the darkness he seems to feel
a smack of earthy odors will arrive — freshly dug truffles.

Up above on the little hills that spread to the sky
no stain of shade is cast by trees: the grape trails the ground
it weighs so much. There no one can stay hidden:
on the summit the shapes of trees are outlined,
black and sparse. If he had his vineyard up there
my old man could stand guard from the house in bed,
with his shotgun pointed. Here at the bottom not even a gun
serves him, for in the darkness there is nothing but leaves.

NORMAN THOMAS DI GIOVANNI



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edge made him restless. I should add that Candy was a touch long in the tooth, at least for one so young, just as Noxon was a touch stiff in the neck for one so flexible.

SO AS we barnstormed[1] our way across America to the Mississippi in our posh conveyances I sought to distract Candy in some ways that were serious and in others that were not serious but not funny either.

"Grampsie," Candy said hoarsely in Hamtramck, where he was resting his throat from the strain of seventeen tune-up appearances, "when I have sold the east bank of the Hudson you and I will become limited partners and we will buy California."

I could tell when Candy was joking even though most of his fellow-Americans could not, for several reasons. Whenever he called me "Grampsie" or "Moneybags"[2] he was joking, and in addition he knew that the major part of my capital was tied up in Swiss banks and that even if I could liquidate these holdings we could barely afford Southern California between us to say nothing of Northern California.

It was good in Hamtramck, an independent principality within the confines of Detroit and thus reminiscent of Liechtenstein. For this and other reasons which are too personal to get into, Casey and I decided to teach Candy the Liechtensteiner Polka. This was very foreign to Candy but since his reflexes are phenomenal and he is very fast at sidestepping and backtracking he was soon executing an acceptable polka with Casey. And with Sheba. It served to keep me in shape for the novel I was writing and to keep Candy from thinking about the next debate which could have been a fatal error. We were to have been joined here by the advance guard or *avant-garde* of the Candy adherents, Frank, Dean, Shirley, Sammy, Mai and Peter, but Sheba and I vetoed this on the grounds that so much intellectual stimulation might have devastating effects on Candy's carefully husbanded inner resources.

Sheba threw a wingding of a party for Candy and me in Elkhart. I might not have noticed I was ninety if Sheba had not made it so important and so pleasant but that party drove it in. However I am not writing about myself here so I had better get on to the party decor and appetizers, which consisted of bleeding hearts strung across the main street of Elkhart and blood

[1] Closer in meaning to *Sturm und Drang* than to storms or barns.
[2] American term of endearment.




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pudding in the great refectory. After we had eaten and smelled well, Casey and Red and Candy and I amused Sheba with a new variant of the British pub game of darts. Baring our midriffs, we inserted bloodsuckers in our navels and presented ourselves alternately, in profile, as targets for poisoned darts which we aimed through Chinese blowguns. It is remarkable how you will suck in your gut when someone is firing a poisoned dart through a Chinese blowgun at a bloodsucker in your navel even though it is part of the fun to appear relaxed and nonchalant.

ALL TOO SUDDENLY we were in Rock Island for the Mississippi River Debate, surely the greatest of all. Noxon, anxious to erase his Hudson wound, won the toss and swiftly demonstrated his mastery over the questing commentators, responding to their thrusts with a series of intelligent and tranquil maneuvers that won the crowd completely. Of course the crowd did not remember as I did such immortals as Charles G. Dawes and Paul McNutt, and so they were willing to believe they were seeing the greatest.

Nevertheless when it came Candy's turn he rose to absolutely unheard of heights of majestic beautiful prowess as the newscasters roared out, stomping and pawing, in the sudden quiet. He executed an about-face[8] with a classic stately simplicity that made me hurt and went on with magic control almost without drawing a deep breath into a passage of hyperbole of such serenity and controlled purity of style that I was reminded irresistibly of the immortal Jack Pearl[9] in his finest hours.

The commentators were aroused and dangerous now and I was close enough to smell their sweat and to see when their hackles rose that they had not been tampered with or fixed in any way. They came at him with bravery and he did the truly dangerous thing, responding superbly with newspeak and doubletalk until they were all but hypnotized by the almost unbearably emotional arrogance and suavity of his beautiful sculptured passes. You have to try to understand that a politician has no chance to correct his art as does a painter or a writer. When he knows intuitively that his fancy footwork is great it takes hold of him so that nothing else in the world matters.

So it was with Candy. Obsessed by his glorious dream of a reply that would satisfy absolutely everyone, he drove himself into a final burst of rhetoric that surpassed anything I had ever experienced. His voice gave way, and I am not ashamed to say that I burst into tears, even though I was the first one to reach him, even before the cameras had switched over to Noxon.

We led him, sobbing and reeling, to the dispensary, where the eminent Latin throat specialist, Dr. Silencio Castro, who had ministered to distinguished revivalists and auctioneers, was waiting with sutures and clamps. "Hold him down here, Grandpa," said the doctor. "I've got to close his mouth at once."

Candy raised his hand imperiously. "No, I will do it myself," he whispered.

The doctor shrugged. "You will be unable to talk for six days."

Candy fainted before our eyes. Over his young body I demanded of Silencio Castro, "Did you have to tell him?"

"Man, he is a politician. A brave one."

"Will it be bad?"

"It will be bad."

"And the pain?"

"The pain of silence will be bad. It is the big pain as you well know. You know how to manage your famous pain, Grandpa. Therefore I will put you in charge of this fine boy. Will you know what to do?"

"I will know."

I thought about Candy's grandfather and about my resolve never to love another politician. But Silencio was right, this had to be done and I was the one to do it. So Candy and I retired to Tipton, Iowa, where I read to him continuously from my *Collected Works*, with no other sound but the wind whispering in the cornstalks. I am not boasting or bragging, simply recording what happened when I say that in only four days Candy was moving his jaws with his accustomed arrogant bravery, and in five days was out-talking me with rapidity, with such superb and magic control that I had to leave off.

My task was done. Sheba and I left Tipton by chartered jet for Tirana, one of my favorite places, to watch the ferociously contested local Albanian elections. There were more debates to come between Candy and Noxon, but regardless of the forecasts I knew in my own heart what the verdict of history would be, and I could not bear to be there to see the humbling of Noxon.

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[8] *Volte face* to *aficionados*.

[9] Baron Munchausen. Better known in democratic America by his commoner name.

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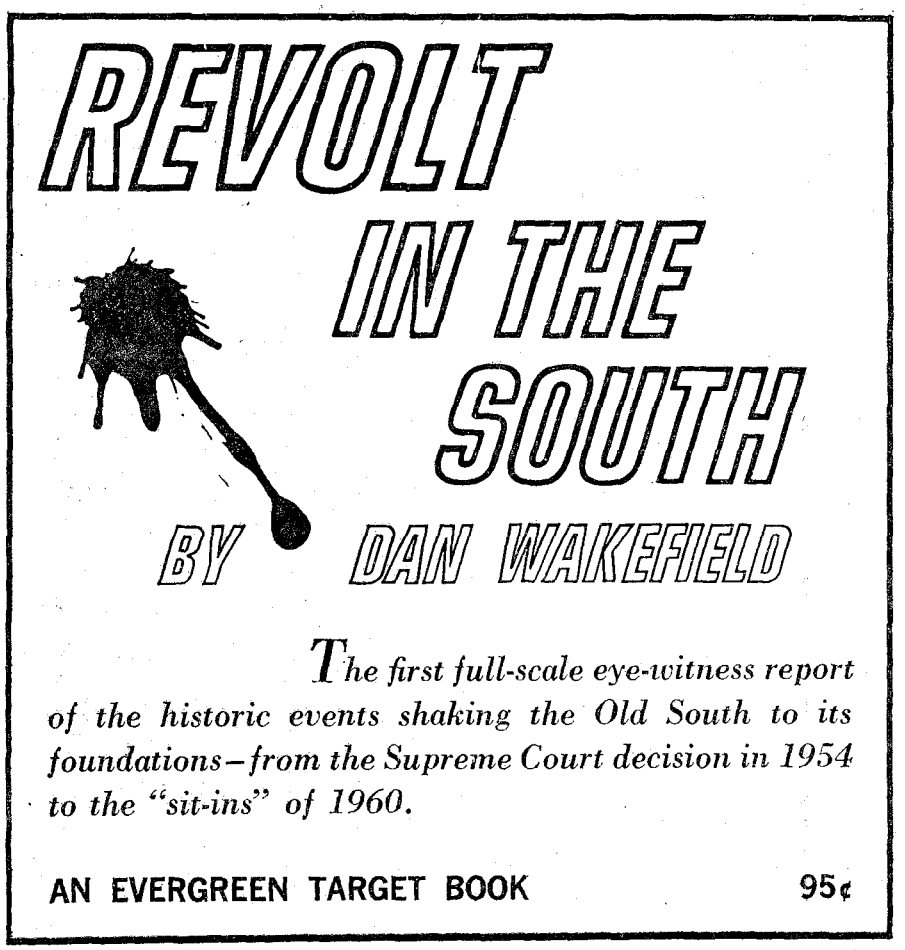
*HARVEY SWADOS is the author of* False Coin *and* On the Line. *A collection of his short stories,* Nights in the Gardens of Brooklyn, *will be published in January (Little, Brown).*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WORLD WAR II was the most devastating war ever fought. Millions of people, combatant and non-combatant, were killed or maimed. Legally and extra-legally, identity and manhood were traduced and destroyed — the corpse in uniform, whether in the heat of an island jungle or in the snow of the Hurtgen forest, retains little more dignity than the emaciated and naked corpse in a common grave at Dachau. War is hell; that war was a fearsome holocaust, and though the war ended fifteen years ago, the peace has not yet begun. We live in a state of anxiety fed by the inconclusiveness of Korea, by the apparent aimlessness of every nation's foreign policy, and by the nuclear-age realization that any future war may truly be decisive. For these reasons — the hellish past, the uneasy present, the beclouded future — most of us want to know the facts within the events which began in 1936 in Spain and ended in 1945 at Nagasaki; we need to know what the war was all about, and if it was a justified hell, what the justification is. A book concerned with a great human catastrophe should tell us something about it, should even teach us something about ourselves and about the world in which we now live and will live.

By and large, the good American fiction of the Second World War satisfies such demands. Though the novels seldom make an explicit moral or political point, their implications are not difficult to discern. Fiction cannot contain more than so much social documentary and remain art. But the very limitations of fiction as history or biography or analysis are virtues. The good fiction writer tries to give as much as is necessary about a limited field of action for that action to ring true. For practical as well as artistic reasons, he takes certain liberties with the physical facts of the war, telescoping or disregarding many of the details which the historian or the biographer would find significant. He wants the reader to take from his book not only the specific detail of rounds fired, ally and enemy killed or wounded, objectives taken or lost, but also an awareness of war which includes yet transcends these details. And what contributes most to such an awareness is the fact that the details matter to somebody.

In fact the fiction writer's main advantage over other war writers is not that he can control his details — the important majority of the facts cannot be tampered with — but that he has control over his people. His characters can be composites, archetypes of good and evil. They can be typical Nazis like Col. Pettinger in *The Crusaders*, or typical American Fascists like General Cummings in *The Naked and the Dead* — or, conversely, they can be typical liberal dilettantes converted finally to active idealists like Lt. Yates and Lt. Hearn in the same two novels. The fiction writer, too, can borrow the attributes of real people to fit into his characters; thus, Otto Skorzeeny shines through Pettinger, and George F. Patton shines through the figures of Gen. Farrish in *The Crusaders* and General Mallon in Ned Calmer's *The Strange Land*. And out of this combination of hero, villain and historical situation—a combination over which the writer has tight control — can grow a powerful and convincing moral lesson, and strong suggestions for its application. Without ever sounding like Jean-Paul Sartre, both Stefan Heym and Norman Mailer convey the almost existentialist conclusion that individual responsibility is the only answer to humanity's problems with itself.

THE American non-fiction writers—historians, personal historians, documentarians, correspondents, commentators — face a different sort of difficulty in attempting to satisfy the reader's demands. They all must stick rigidly to the facts of campaigns, battles and skirmishes; and they must deal with real men, not composites, in real situations. While these restrictions serve well to fulfill the reader's primary demand for verisimilitude, they may at the same time seriously hamper the communication of any meaning to be found in the catastrophe of war. Some of the war correspondents, documentarians and commentators have tried to fill both demands; however, most of the non-fiction writers have been content to serve as memory prodders and gap fillers, making clear those things which were never clear before — things like the over-all tide of battle of which the individual GI could never be aware at the time.

Legitimate histories can do both things well, provided they are written eloquently enough and possess some sensitivity to war as a human drama. The straight accounts of logistical fact, of statistics,

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*JOSEPH WALDMEIR, who contributed an essay on World War II fiction to an earlier special book issue, teaches English at Michigan State University.*

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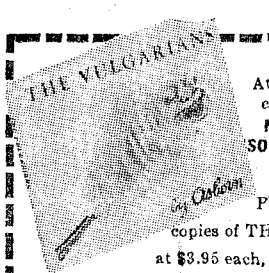


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which constitute the bulk of the official histories, are pedestrian and deadly, dully cold. But books like Louis L. Snyder's *The War*[1], Robert Merriam's *Dark December*, C. Vann Woodward's *Battle for Leyte Gulf*, and Martin Caidin's just published *Black Thursday*[2], are far from cold and dull, yet remain historically accurate. I have chosen these four out of a multitude of possibilities because they span the branches of service, the theatres of operation and the key battles very well. Snyder's book is "a concise history" of the war on all fronts from 1939 to 1945; *Dark December* is concerned with the Army during the Ardennes crisis, the greatest battle of the European war; *The Battle for Leyte Gulf* is an account of the climactic naval engagement of the Pacific war, the success of which assured the recapture of the Philippines and the ultimate defeat of Japan; *Black Thursday* recounts the bloody daylight bombing raids on German industrial centers during 1943, culminating in the bloodiest of them all, the October 14 blasting of Schweinfurt by B-17s and B-24s.

*THE WAR*, which has just been issued, stands apart from the other three by virtue of the monumental task which it attempts. Its jacket calls it "an exciting, swift-paced narrative" which "makes electrifying reading." That is true; *The War* is certainly good reading, though Snyder has not the professional ability of Martin Caidin to select, work over and compress his material, and consequently, *Black Thursday* is a more readable book. But though it is electrifying, *The War* is not the "complete, well-balanced, judicious" history which another of the jacket's blurbs calls it. The history of the Second World War simply cannot be encompassed in such concise terms as 537 pages demand; the necessary superficiality becomes most apparent when one notes the breadth of detail present in the other three histories of aspects of the war. In addition, Professor Snyder is here far from being an objective historian. Quisling is for him an "oily collaborationist"; thousands of Americans reacted to Pearl Harbor with: "'Why, the yellow bastards!' Others exploded with variations of 'We'll stamp their buck teeth in!'" While most readers with long memories will tend to sympathize with Snyder's biases, many will see them as unfortunate anachronisms in a historical account.

But withal, Snyder's is an important and useful book: it is to date the only history of the war in one volume. Furthermore, it is the only one of the four books considered here that includes some speculation about the lessons to be learned from the war. Professor Snyder views with alarm the resurgence of nationalism and xenophobia since 1945. He shows that these were two of the major causes of World War II, and his "Aftermath" sounds a serious warning.

The other three books satisfy somewhat better than Snyder's our first demand to know what happened. Woodward and Merriam make use of all available materials — including captured Japanese and German documents and postwar interviews with enemy officers — to set forth the background, courses and results of their respective battles. Caidin, who used the enemy point of view skillfully in his *The Night Hamburg Died*, does not repeat that device here. Yet he does not stint on details. We learn how many bombers were involved, how many aborted, and for what reasons, and what was the effect of the raids on German industry. And Caidin makes the story of the Schweinfurt adventure every bit as fascinating reading as W. W. Haines's *Command Decision*, the novel built on the raids. *Battle for Leyte Gulf* is the most detailed of the three accounts, and therefore seems to be the most accurate. If the book has a fault, it lies in being too detailed — the untutored reader cannot follow the technical language and approach at many points. But the same reader cannot help being impressed by the industry and excellent organization of the book. Perhaps because the Battle of the Bulge was somehow more dramatic than the naval engagement at Leyte — as, in fact, the war in Europe was ideologically more dramatic than the war in the Pacific — *Dark December* is more exciting reading despite Merriam's occasional propagandistic cuteness.

IT IS possible, of course, to make war history exciting by the intentional use of these cutenesses or by making it gung-ho, as was done often during the war for propaganda or public relations or otherwise "patriotic" purposes. The best of a bad lot — W. L. White's *They Were Expendable*, Ted. W. Lawson's *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo* and Ross S. Carter's *Those Devils in Baggy Pants* — thrived on such gimmicks. Consider the General in the "Preface" to *Thirty Seconds* who says to the Lt. Col.: "'But listen here, damn you: as soon as you *do* bomb Tokyo you get the hell back here to Washington and go to work!'" Books like these three merit consideration primarily so that we may judge by

[1]Messner, $7.95.
[2]E. P. Dutton, $4.95.



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contrast the value of the legitimate histories.

Personal histories — biographical and autobiographical works, and memoirs — have the same general drawbacks as the public relations histories, complicated by some additional drawbacks of their own. In the first place, they are usually written about or by, or ghosted for, a serviceman exceptional by reason of rank or action. Audie Murphy's *To Hell and Back*, for example, besides being excessively gung-ho, is far too personal an account to speak to the reader of the things he wants to know. It is not a book about the American soldier during the war; it is a book about Audie Murphy who, by his own testimony, was an extraordinary soldier. Similarly, the many war memoirs, both Allied and enemy, which have appeared over the past sixteen years, have not been written by or for the garden-variety serviceman. Most of them concern high-ranking officers, few of whom were actually fighting servicemen. The facts they deal with are the facts of grand strategy, mass-movement, or behind-the-scenes maneuvering. It is as if the memoirist and the soldier had been in two different wars. Furthermore, the memoirist frequently has an ax to grind; he feels compelled to defend his strategy or to attack the strategy of other Allied officers. We are all familiar with the running feud between Montgomery and Eisenhower over the best way to have brought Germany to her knees; the sniping continues, with Monty firing the most recent salvo (*The Memoirs of Field-Marshall Montgomery*). We are familiar too with "Vinegar Joe" Stilwell's three-front battles with Chiang, Mountbatten and F.D.R., (*The Stilwell Papers*); and with *Wedemeyer Reports*, in which the replacement for Stilwell opened a new front in the attack on F.D.R., accusing him of turning China over to communism and of instigating a senseless war with Germany. The second-guessing provides somewhat interesting reading, but says very little to the reader who wants to know what the war was all about and what it meant.

Finally — except for *The Stilwell Papers* whose informality, preserved in the excellent editing of Theodore White, is refreshing — such books are notoriously ill-written, even if ghosted. This excerpt from the two paragraphs in *Crusade in Europe* which Eisenhower devotes to the horrors of concentration camps is a fair sample of the quality:

> I have never felt able to describe my emotional reactions when I first came face to face with indisputable


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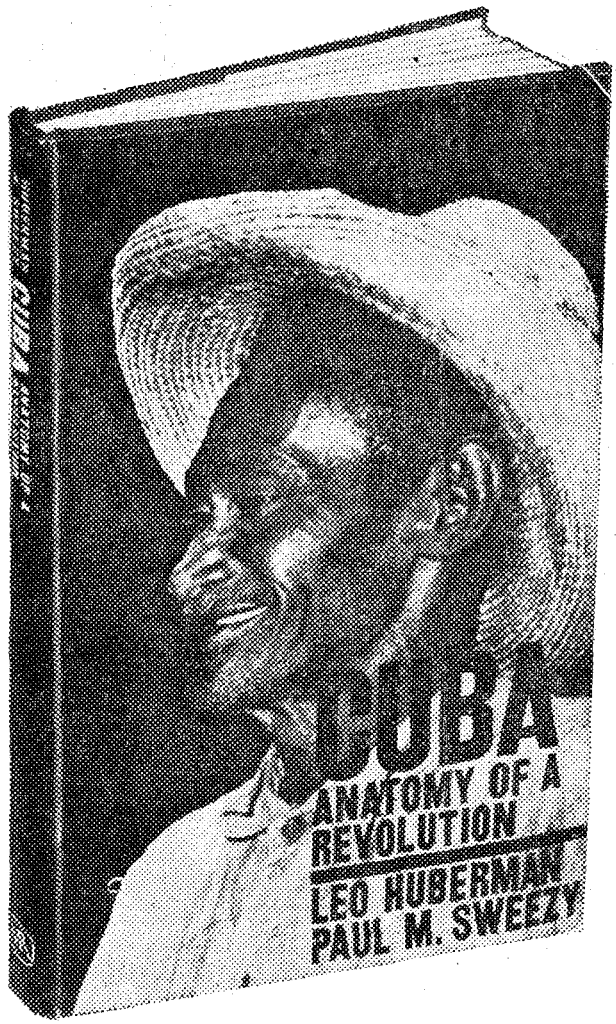


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evidence of Nazi brutality and ruthless disregard of every shred of decency. Up to that time I had known about it only generally or through secondary sources. I am certain, however, that I have never at any other time experienced an equal sense of shock.

One wonders how many readers can share Ike's shock on reading this flatly unfeeling statement.

WAR CORRESPONDENCE, when it was done well and honestly, succeeded admirably in conveying emotion to the reader and in charging that emotion with meaning. The photographs and some of the text of Robert Capa's *Slightly Out of Focus*, the cartoons and text of Bill Mauldin's *Up Front*, the columns by Martha Gellhorn collected in *The Face of War*, and Richard Tregaskis' *Guadalcanal Diary*—which I list here because it reads like correspondence though the book was not printed piecemeal — are among the very best. When the correspondence was done poorly it was either fearsomely gung-ho and sentimental (asserting, for instance, that all soldiers are afraid, that the highest bravery is the conquest of fear and that all American soldiers are astonisingly brave) or it was simply blah. It seems that every correspondent, however small his gifts, had a book contract in his pocket when he boarded ship or plane for a theatre of operation. The two fundamentally good writers who erred occasionally in the first direction were Ernie Pyle (*Here Is Your War* and *Brave Men*) and John Steinbeck (*Once There Was a War*). The writers who erred in the second direction were legion.

The correspondents faced problems which the other non-fiction writers were spared because they did their writing for publication while the war was in progress. As Steinbeck puts it in the Introduction to his collected columns:

> The events set down here did happen. But on rereading this reportage, my memory becomes alive to the other things, which also did happen and were not reported. That they were not reported was partly a matter of orders, partly traditional, and largely because there was a huge and gassy thing called the War Effort. Anything which interfered with or ran counter to the War Effort was automatically bad.

I said above that the non-fiction writers were more restricted than the fiction writers because they had to stick to the facts. The correspondents were the most restricted of all because they had to stick to the facts which were given to them or which were non-censorable. Still, they could do a fine job of satisfying our first demand without hampering the war effort. Capa says pridefully that "the soldier who looks at [Capa's] shots of Troina, ten years from now in his home in Ohio, will be able to say, 'That's how it was.'" And Mauldin's Willie and Joe still evoke the same recognition.

Some of the war correspondents tried to get at the meaning of the war; none succeeded better than Martha Gellhorn in her column for April, 1945 ("Das Deutsches Volk") and May, 1945 ("Dachau"). Anger, pity, terror inform each word. But most of the correspondents steered clear of ideology. They were reporters, and though they might have seen the war as a crusade by a group of individuals committed patriotically to the human race in its struggle against inhumanity, they were aware that most of the soldiers did not see it that way, or if they did, did not say so. If this bothered them at all, as reporters they ignored it; they might, like Ned Calmer and John Hersey, turn novelist (*The Strange Land* and *A Bell for Adano*) to get it off their chests.

THE documentarians have tried to get at meaning and emotion by a more direct means than any of the other non-fiction writers. They are, in fact, not writers at all, but editors and compilers; collectors usually of first-hand accounts of some phase or aspect of the war. When well done, the documentaries succeed better than most of the other non-fiction in satisfying both of our demands; though for the most part they lack both the H-hour X-platoon Y-objective kind of facts, and the explicit discussion of war aims and consequences. They succeed by giving the reader most of the available elements on the basis of which an emotion is founded and a meaning is reached.

Don Congdon has edited two fine documentaries: *Combat: Pacific Theater* and *Combat: European Theater;* and an excellent one, *The Taste of Courage*[3], has just been brought out by Desmond Flower and James Reeves. Congdon has collected a number of first-hand accounts of the major battles in each theatre. Some are written by professional correspondents, most by skillful non-professionals; but they all ring of authenticity in the way that only a first-hand account can. Since there is seldom any gung-ho in the truth about combat, there is no gung-ho here. These are simple, honest accounts of how it felt to be there. The meaning of the

[3]Harper, $10.



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war as such is not discussed, but it seems to me that there is much significance in the fact that none of the writers argues that we should not have been there. Flower and Reeves's "conspectus" is a much more ambitious undertaking than either or both of the *Combats*. It covers the war from 1939 through 1945 in Europe, Russia, the Pacific and the CBI Theatre, and it includes not only reports of battles by Allied participants and observers, but items ranging all the way from memoranda from Hitler to his generals to accounts of the personal feelings of housewives of Allied and enemy nations at moments of terror. It is a remarkable book of some 1,100 pages, full of hope and fear and bitterness and joy. You cannot read it without coming very close to the feeling and meaning of war.

*The Taste of Courage* is good enough to rank just behind a book which it dwarfs in size but hardly in impact or meaning: John Hersey's *Hiroshima*. This volume is both documentary and correspondence, and in its strong message, it is also commentary. It sketches the lives of six survivors of the A-bomb drop from August 6, the morning of the bombing, to August 18. I am certain it is unnecessary to summarize the book here; suffice it to say that, more than any other of the non-fiction works about the war, *Hiroshima* most completely satisfies our demands to know what happened and the meaning of the happening. The shock experienced, even in rereading it, is far from enjoyable.

THE FINAL category to be discussed is commentary. I have saved it until last, not because it deserves a place of prominence above the other categories, but because it is in the commentaries that we find the summary statements and the explicit attempts to apply the lessons of the past to the present and future world.

Many books on the general subject of war's causes and aims appeared during the war; with few exceptions, they were second rate. One of them—Arthur Miller's *Situation Normal*—deserves attention. It was written during 1944 while Miller toured armed forces training areas as part of his research for writing the screen play of Pyle's *Brave Men*. Miller discusses various types of training and trainees, occasionally getting at characters and dramatic incidents which proved useful to his screen play. But somewhere along the line, he was sidetracked from his main objective into a consideration of the ideological causes of the war. He doesn't say anything startlingly new, but what he does say and the way he says it is so obviously sincere that one is convinced of its truth in the context of its time. He says that the war was being fought not for " 'free enterprise,' as the well-known ads of our big industries maintain"; nor for "the words 'Keep America the Same,' as a certain automobile company insists"; but "for our Belief. And that Belief says, simply, that we believe all men are equal." He says that in the soldiers' criticizing and griping, the war "almost sounds like a property owner's war, with either side acting like the other if their real estate holdings were reversed. And yet you know, listening to the way they speak, that they do not want it to be merely a property owner's war because it is a mockery to die for property alone. They know in their hearts that there is evil in the other side, and that something in our country would prevent us from ever acting like the enemy." *Situation Normal* is well worth reading in order to get hold once more of that certainty of justification which motivated so many of us to fight the war as if it were a true crusade.

This knowledge of evil in the other side lay at the heart of the liberal dilemma from 1936 until America's entrance into the war. The two horns were pacifism and anti-fascism, and they became increasingly difficult to reconcile with the movement of the war away from Spain and toward the Continent, and with the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The best way to resolve the dilemma was to become pro-World War II while remaining fundamentally anti-war as a means of solving man's problems. This was easy to do provided one hated fascism sufficiently. The best example of an American liberal writer's ability to make the resolution is Irwin Shaw who, in 1936, produced his pacifistic play, *Bury the Dead*, and in 1948, brought out the clearly pro-World War II novel, *The Young Lions*. Among the non-fiction writers, Martha Gellhorn most clearly embodies the dilemma. In the commentary "Introduction" to *The Face of War* she asserts that she was a rabid anti-Fascist from her days of reporting the war in Spain through 1945; the assertion is supported by her columns, particularly the two mentioned earlier. But in the same "Introduction" she insists that she does not understand the argument that one must fight for a principle "against tyrants and slavery" since war solves nothing.

*The Face of War* appeared in 1959, but I hardly think that Gellhorn has become less anti-Fascist over the past


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fifteen years. With the growing possibility of nuclear warfare, however, she has become more pacifist, and it is nuclear warfare that she has in mind here. The Second World War was terrible, but it may have been justified. There is no justification for the next war. Principles are not worth the destruction of the present generation nor the poisoning of the next. As Martin Caidin put it in *The Night Hamburg Died:* "But even the debacle of Hamburg will be as nothing against the holocaust of thermonuclear bombs. For the sake of mankind's future existence, have we heeded the lesson?"

Not many of the war writers have dealt with this; the second of our demands, as specifically as Gellhorn and Caidin, and they confine their discussion to brief introductions. None of them has dealt with it as carefully as some of the non-war writers, such as Rex Tugwell in *A Chronicle of Jeopardy* and C. Wright Mills in *The Causes of World War Three*. Still, the truly good war books in each category can satisfy both of our demands, implicitly if not explicitly. Out of a tremendous mass of material, I have chosen those books which best illustrate either the fulfillment of or the failure to fulfill the demands. Three of them—*The Taste of Courage, Black Thursday* and *The War* are just now in print. Many other fine books, both American and foreign—and some not so fine—would have to be included in an exhaustive list (see Appendix A to Snyder's *The War* for a relatively complete listing).

# A Slouch Toward Bethlehem

## *Marcus Klein*

*Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;*
*Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world*
—The Second Coming
W. B. Yeats

THINGS fall apart. The rough beast that Yeats knew, its hour come round at last, slouches toward Bethlehem and is making remarkable progress. For Yeats the beast was the omen of the apocalypse, the fearful convulsion of the last of twenty centuries, the cataclysmic yielding, at Bethlehem, of one cycle of civilization to another. But that was years ago. Yeats died. The beast is nearer now, almost so near you can touch it, and we know that it may be rougher, and much sooner, and much more decisive than William Butler Yeats, a powerful dreamer, could ever dream. The breath of the very last holocaust is hot in our faces, tickling our nostrils. No one not severely catarrhal can fail to know it is there. The bombs are already aloft, radioactive fallout is in the breeze, and munching cows munch strontium-90.

And it just might be the case that what confusion has invoked cannot be revoked, that the beast is no longer to be caged, that there is nothing any more that good will and strenuous effort can do. All the sensible simplisms—ban the bomb, under enforceable agreement mysteriously arrived at, without agreement, disarm, be unilaterally moral—are overborne by terrible exploding facts. Things have got very complicated. The roasting sinners in the old Scottish sermon turned toward heaven and cried "O Lord, we did not know," and the Lord answered in His wisdom, "Well, ye ken th' nou."

Too late.

Too late? That is never an answer for the enterprising, as of course it should not be. *Something* had better be tried. Of course. Satan's hosts roused themselves up from hell itself to build Pandemonium and debate their doom, what had happened and what doom was to come. They were angels, we can't do as much, but we can raise our lesser

*MARCUS KLEIN, who teaches in the English department of Barnard College, has contributed criticism and fiction to* Hudson Review, Western Review *and other periodicals. He is now completing a study of the novel since mid-century for publication by Meridian.*

### Doom: A Bibliography

**Gina Berriault**
*The Descent.* Atheneum. $3.50.

**Constantine Fitz Gibbon**
*When the Kissing Had to Stop.* W. W. Norton. $3.95.

**Walter M. Miller, Jr.**
*A Canticle for Leibowitz.* J. B. Lippincott. $4.95.

**Mordecai Roshwald**
*Level 7.* McGraw-Hill $3.75.

**Nevil Shute**
*On the Beach.* William Morrow. $3.95. New American Library. Paper. 50c.



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pandemonium, we can do our bit. As first of all—maybe last of all—we can vigorously alert each other, become really aware of the fact that we and all our hope of progeny may soon be blasted. Anything less would be irresponsible. And if we can just get ourselves aroused enough, why there is no telling. . . . Become "aware of the problem," as the best and most liberal among us do say, though what we are to become aware of may not be precisely a problem now.

Our chief of state, for instance, though given to mumbling and soft answers, does offer exemplary awareness. He is sincere and responsible. So is our next chief of state likely to be, and so is *theirs*, and so is the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy. There are omens everywhere and the least one can do is read them. Many do. James Reston haruspicates. Arthur Krock slyly scries. Edward R. Murrow converses with spirits and Gabriel Heater explores his dreams. Also there are colorful individual rousings—the voyage of the *Golden Rule* —waggling fingers of humane physicists, statistical researches, movies, international petitions and mass demonstrations which, no matter what their political colorations, testify, all of them, to urgency, indeed the last extremity, and the squeezing need for awareness.

And novelists write apocalyptic novels. Generally poor ones, a current handful suggests—except that obvious sincerity is always dignified—and containing an astonishing sameness of novelistic inspiration, but honestly devoted, all of them, to waking us from dangerous slumber, to shocking us into knowledge of the peril. Which they should be able to do superbly because—such is the notion of every novel of deliberate propaganda—fiction is so sweet a bait, you sit down to eat a tasty tidbit of a story, and, whoompf!, before you know it you're choking on gobbets of uncooked truth. Not that novels really work that way, even when they are meant to, but there have been novels that have precipitated social action. They can do it. Novels bring bad news. It is their business. Even bad novels can do it.

But the novels at hand, well-meaning as they most certainly are and urgent and rich in gloom, don't. Not for any

## A Poem of Despondencies

We go whatever route to run un-
obstructed. "A city without seasons"
may bug a man who needs thunder storms,
snow, frost-bitten leaves to drive away
stagnant August.
Kêres, dirty little things that fill the air
obscure a weather's message.
What softness massage festering reason?
In Scotland fairies
coverd with hair scare girls and
prepare twisted paths into the miré,
false landscapes, blight light,
sour dawn, noon or near night
to reflect heart's discontent or
raise vapors from sexual treasure
as gold rots in the ground sprouts fever.
This green is obscene, seeded
where the will moves not, no
stout stalk leaf of the grass
but the green kêres, in fury, fly
up from bog of
—insatiable under the hand urge?
It's the fearful rising where the cock
won't rise
that sickens the eyes, tricks
the domestic poseur.
Black bile not blood drips
from the enclosure.
This is the way the land lies.
As who from dreams as from marsh
wakes.
They are mosquitoes biting wet flanks
of natural flesh.
Did you? Did you? Who? opend the damnd
box? But
I hate locks. I wish I could give you
such openness,
filths, upswarms of fervor, to hold.
A man held so, up-
held we see in staind unmoving
sea moved sustaind in
Hell,
mannd against calm.

ROBERT DUNCAN


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lack of horrors. Nor are the horrors, as one might suspect, mere creepy delights. They offer no werewolves, no vampires, and, considering that they take place in years ranging from 1962 to 3781, they are modest in their gadgetry. Their whole strategy is the probable and they figure the probable very closely. There is, it happens, a two-headed lady with a six-legged dog in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, which is the only one of these novels to contain rocket ships, inhuman automation, *mutatis mutandis*, but that is the longest stretch. Other horrors are closer to what we know: the mass vomiting and diarrhea of radiation sickness (*On the Beach, Level 7*); mass euthanasia (*On the Beach, A Canticle for Leibowitz*); the claustral prospect of mankind moving for generations into sheltering caves (*Level 7, The Descent*); the collapse of civilization into a new dismaler dark ages (*A Canticle for Leibowitz*); the ineluctability of absolute destruction on earth (*Level 7, On the Beach, Leibowitz*); the Russians (*When the Kissing Had to Stop*). And this is real stuff, it rings true to one's own knowledge and imagination, and there is no perverse joy to be found in it, it is authentically ghastly. When doom cracks, it is surely going to sound very much like this.

At the same time, and loaded so with ghastliness, there is something very innocent about this fiction. Boom though it does with atomic blasts, it is unexciting—unexciting, it must be, because it keeps itself so pure in so pure a rage of testifying, and so far from the horny facts.

Because it appeals to innocence which no one any more has. Its entire action —Fitz Gibbon's novel notably excepted—is an injuring of incredible innocents. The hero of each but one of these books is the same hero: a deep-down decent, artless fellow, unsophisticated, unpolitical, unassertive and ready for wonder, of no more than middling intelligence, come to us from Iowa. And his name, in Miss Berriault's incarnation, is Arnold Elkins. (In Mr. Roshwald's it is "X-127"; in the late Nevil Shute's, it is Dwight, but it might as well be Gregory Peck; in Mr. Miller's he is a series of abbots over several centuries in the life of a monastery and he has several superadded abbatial charms, like jolliness, unsuspected worldliness, a command of Latin, a look of wisdom and a propensity for amusing lapses from clerical dignity, but he is much the same man.) The last fellow in the world to be associated with holocaust, the Wrath of God, or crimes of violence. (In a couple of instances, the last fellow in the world.) Nor did he rig quiz shows, commit with his neighbor's wife—Fitz Gibbon's novel again excepted; he kept his hand out of plackets and his pen from lenders' books.

What outrage then when the thunder claps, the missiles whine, and that unoffending he begins to vomit. Poor innocent unimplicated worm! The catharsis of innocent worms is not our catharis and this is not tragedy, it is sentimental melodrama. But poor worm anyway. In this special case certainly we ought to be stirred. And we might be—but it is with that call to be stirred that these novels really end. The innocent has some further innocent suggestions, but he lives and dies primarily in order to stir us, to make us aware until we will tremble with awareness.

Wake up, America! *Wachet auf!*

But look around, is there anybody who is not already scared half out of his wits? We are wide awake now and quaking, and nobody likely to read these novels *needs* further to be alarmed. These holocausters are in fact a little rude and certainly redundant. Make us "aware of the problem"? We are entirely aware. Are things even worse than we thought? No, that absolutely cannot be the case. If anything is likely to make us ignore that awful bomb, it is just this frenetic activity of reciprocal alerting. The voice of the prophets raised to a certain pitch obscures the voice of doom. All this good will and all this liberal activism create false security rather than alarm. What we are desperately in need of is an idea, even a bad idea, just something not a cheap idea. Not another whir of the siren. The great rough beast is here and upon us and at this ultimate shift there is nothing so irrelevant as prophecy unless it is an invitation to a mass meeting. These outraged-citizen novelists, shrill or wheedling, arch or intense, bent on creating an outraged

## As the Children Quarreled

As the children quarreled
Their childhood swirled away.
Mother turned aside
Weeping all that's ever lost.

Gross words, gross thoughts
Explode in the boy's brain.
Away swirls the dream
Out of which he was born.

All that's conceived in love
Wastes with its own breath.
Conception is the whole —
The rest swirls away to death.

M. L. ROSENTHAL



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citizenry, are unexciting because things are worse than *they* think. They are living, for all their imaginative leap of centuries, in 1945, if not 1935. The task is not more and more awareness, the issue is not susceptible any longer to moral gestures, and no din of pious propaganda is going to tumble down walls.

Not that they have no ideas, these doomsters. They have some. Further cause for alarm. Hopeless ideas, and because so hopeless, more terrifying indeed than all their other horrors.

Nevil Shute opposed to catastrophe simple British decorum, a wonderful discipline in non-realization, and contempt for the silliness of nations squabbling, he supposed, over questions of honor. "I mean," says boyish Peter to girlish Mary, "if a couple of hundred million people all decide that their national honor requires them to drop cobalt bombs upon their neighbor, well, there's not much that you or I can do about it. The only possible hope would have been to educate them out of their silliness." "But how could you have done that, Peter? I mean, they'd all left school." His answer is: newspapers.

Mordecai Roshwald supplies tokens: Mother and Sunshine. The young rebel of the story goes mad for love of his mother. ("He was rather a pleasant fellow before he became mentally unbalanced.") The hero loves sunshine. The rebel and the hero share ideas of Love and Freedom. Which are respectable ideas, but lofty beyond the importunate necessity. "Life and love are spreading," says tousle-headed X-127. "Give them a little space to take root, a beginning, and they will conquer the world!" Like crab grass. The novel is dedicated to Dwight and Nikita. Fellows, are you listening?

WALTER M. MILLER, JR., supplies the Church. It was the Church that once through a time of relapse preserved learning and civilization—that is not an unimpeachable argument, but it has general truth—and it can do it again. At the end of this novel, and with the coming of the Bomb the second time round, a new Immaculate Conception occurs, one-half of that two-headed woman, and the Church sends off microfilm and its own nucleus in a rocket ship. Bizarre, but the Church will go on going on, the soul so guarded is unquenchable, in these ashes of ours of accumulated sins is a new phoenix. There is indeed, if you look at it that way, something bracing in the holocaust, a promise of health: "When the world was in darkness and wretchedness, it could believe in perfection and yearn for it. But when the world became bright with reason and riches, it began to sense the narrowness of the needle's eye, and that rankled for a world no longer willing to believe or yearn." Perdition is a term of spiritual progress. The world is about to be torn apart again "that Man might hope again in wretched darkness." This is no time for scoffing secularists, but Mr. Miller's is a comic view of the sundered atom which amounts to withdrawal from all immediacy. One wouldn't want the wretched darkness in order to prove his hopeful theology.

*The Descent* is a novel ineptly devised, patronizing and stone deaf to the rhythms of ordinary speech, but Gina Berriault is ablaze with constructive suggestions. And she can fix responsibility: foggy thinking in Washington, demagoguery, big business, selfish labor interests, Luce Publications, Inc., Public Relations, Motivational Research, optimism, beauty contests, intellectual pettiness in the academy and Billy Graham. For a wonder she does not include the violence on television, there isn't much that escapes her knowingness, but then hers is a very short novel forced to accommodate, too, the legions of light. Which are: irresistible demonstrations, principally at Hiroshima, stupendous petitions, non-violent sabotage, militant pacifism and Albert Schweitzer. Her Arnold Elkins becomes possessed of a plan—one evolved, and that is important, by qualified technicians—for compulsory total disarmament and conversion to peaceful pursuits. It is a sanguine plan, a serious plan, and one


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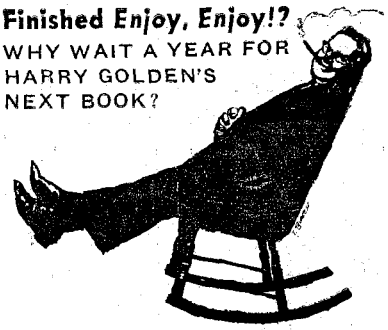

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that sets Arnold back on his heels, but that is all of the plan there is. Details aren't Arnold's business, he is enthusiastic, and Miss Berriault is impatient of them. At her novel's climax Arnold's thirteen-year-old daughter demands unilateral disarmament.

*When the Kissing Had to Stop* is a different matter, and it is refreshing. It is by far the best of these novels and independent of them a very good novel, the most thinking of them, the most thorough, the most engaged, the most severe and the least liberal. It votes Tory. But in this raging company, it is prophylactic. Its special doom is political and pre-nuclear. England one evening becomes a Soviet satellite—panicked by the possibility of the Bomb and eroded by mass demonstrating, by a rage for neutralism, and in its weakness preyed upon. Mr. Fitz Gibbon is a little smug in his reactionary foresight, but he proposes a possibility in British politics, and if it is not one this year in our own, it anyway suggests a real complication in innocent protesting. The rage to testify is open to manipulation, one needn't be Rep. Francis Walter of Pennsylvania to spot Stalinists behind the arras.

But spy-hunting is a drug and a dangerous pastime, too. Meanwhile there is that slouching great beast, heavy and hungry, here and right upon us and blotting out all horizons.

A good citizen will do *something*.

What?

Vote?

## Arnold Wesker: 'A Sort of Socialism'

### *Ted Hughes*

PLAYS about the working class are hardly new, but it is a new thing and a development of the last three or four years that writers from the working class or near it, such as John Osborne, Harold Pinter and Arnold Wesker, should be not merely noticeable in the London theatre but supplying it with the most interesting and intellectually respectable pieces.

These three are precociously skilled technicians; however, the similarity ends there. Osborne, when he writes about the working class, writes of its conflict with other classes and brings such a generalizing flair to this that *Look Back In Anger*, reading more and more like an allegory, seems as much the projection of the mind of a generation as the chosen subject of one writer. Neither Pinter nor Wesker has the same sweep, though maybe both direct their gifts with more individuality.

Pinter evidently takes his cue from Beckett. In *The Birthday Party* and *The Caretaker*, Beckett's senile or insect despair has become a three A.M. suburban malaise where the personality decomposes according to Jung, and language has retrenched to a system of animal reflexes, nervous tics and a desperate stage of self-delusion over an opening gulf of nothingness. This mixture may sound risky, and for all the gravity of his theme Pinter's polish does carry an effect of lightness. But to my mind he holds the salient, with his dialogue, in whatever the English theatre may have at present of an *avant-garde*. The intensely dramatic and at the same time intensely musical exchange that he achieves makes up a kind of sinister poetry — the one successful scion of Eliot's "Sweeney Agonistes."

Arnold Wesker, born in 1932, is the youngest of the three. Of his trilogy, the three plays by which he is known, *Chicken Soup With Barley* appeared in 1958, *Roots* in 1959 and *I'm Talking About Jerusalem* in 1960.* This summer the Royal Court Theatre presented the entire trilogy. This is how Wesker describes his work:

> A number of themes bind the trilogy together. Basically it is a family; on another level it is a play about human relationships; and on a third, and most important level, it is a story of people moved by political ideas in a particular social time.
>
> There are many theories about Socialism. *Chicken Soup With Barley* handles the Communist aspect. *Roots* handles the personal aspect, that is, Ronnie [one of the characters] feels you can only teach by example. *I'm Talking About Jerusalem* is a sort of study in a William Morris kind of Socialism. If you like, the three plays are three aspects of Socialism, played out through the lives of a Jewish family. . . .

From one point of view, Wesker merely uses each of these "aspects" to fill out

*TED HUGHES, the English poet, has lived and taught in both the United States and England. His latest collection is* Lupercal *(Macmillan).*

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a play, and from another point of view, he makes a judgment about each of them: Communism cheats the Communist; William Morris Socialism is impracticable; the "personal" method works — and seems, in fact, the only method by which socialism fulfills any of its aspirations.

This last is important. Wesker is a man with a message. In published articles he makes no secret of his political education and concerns. Then what is his message? A sort of socialism? He would say so. It is necessary to keep an eye on that phrase "a sort of socialism," because in plays so stuffed with other much more recognizable forms of socialism, it might be given a wrong meaning.

At bottom Wesker is a naive lyrical poet, full of joy, in love with individuals and all the minute details of their lives, and with the moment-to-moment chance to live. He is also an analytical realist: he sees how people neglect their chances, let their feelings die, lose contact with life and with each other, sinking into routine and indifference. In the collision of the poet and the analyst lies his suffering. He can't just give people up, he loves them too much, but he can't bear to see the way they let themselves down either. His "socialism," his message, takes the form of a desperate public exhortation — wake up and live.

THE MAIN criticisms against Wesker have been leveled at this moral vehemence and the rhetoric it sometimes excites him to. It can be argued, however, that this very vehemence is the root of his gift. The occasional rhetorical explosions are a small price to pay for what comes with them.

The distinction of Wesker's writing is the utterly convincing and deeply moving quality of its realism. Wherever he presents life, whether it is only a card game or an elaborate cottage tea, he is first-rate. This is not just a surface realism: one becomes aware of reality stretching away in space and time, a world of topographical, historical, social and political details, suggested without noticeable effort, in support of characters who are themselves thoroughly alive. Wesker's ear for working-class speech ranges through the whole variety of working-class minds and emotions. Together with this, he possesses a musical gift: his passages of dialogue sometimes take on the inevitability of a delicate kind of poetry, and this is directly related to the most remarkable thing about these plays and certainly the thing to be grateful for: the flood of love which sustains them.

It is interesting to assess just how well these masses of impartially created life enforce his propaganda and realize his message. In *Chicken Soup With Barley*, Wesker presents a working-class Jewish family, the Kahns, through the crises of their affair with communism. The play opens in London's East End in 1936, on the day of the October fourth riot in which the Kahns and all their friends take part, leaps ten years, shows Ronnie Kahn maturing into a passionate idealist, Socialist by birth as it were, shows the family breaking up and the friends scattering as the fever of the cause cools in all but Ronnie and the mother, and ends in December, 1956, when Ronnie returns home demoralized, his illusions having gone down with Hungary.

In this play, the voice of the exasperated poet of joy in Wesker is obviously Sarah Kahn's. Her rhetoric has nothing to do with communism. It speaks for the right to live and love, the fight against the insidious paralysis of indifference, idleness and fear. And behind Sarah, as if the whole play has been a parable to demonstrate the truth of her words, is the example of her husband, Harry: the weakling, the liar and petty thief who ran away from the riot to take shelter with his mother, who can't keep a job, who fails in all his family responsibilities. By the last act he has become an almost speechless and incapable paralytic.

In the last play of the trilogy, *I'm Talking About Jerusalem*, Ada and Dave Simmonds, Ronnie's sister and brother-in-law, make a heroic attempt to live out their socialism by producing handmade furniture in a lonely corner of Norfolk. The furniture is hard to sell, and eventually they are forced to return to London. Their hopes and disappointments are portrayed in Wesker's usual moving way, and this play contains some of the best moments in the trilogy. At the start and finish, however, *Jerusalem* succumbs to Ronnie's rhetoric. Nobody defies him, as Sarah did in *Chicken Soup With Barley*, and it seems that Wesker's own certainties are baffled here by the disappointed retreat of the Simmonds. His message seems to have crept humbly into their determination to go on as best they can in London, without illusions. At the end Ronnie can muster no more than a despairing "We're bloody mad to cry," shouted at the abandoned fen darkness.

*Roots*, the middle play of the trilogy, is the best artistically, and here too the message works most forcibly, with the surest grip on reality. The spokesman for Wesker in this play is Ronnie, as we hear him through the voice of Beatie Bryant. He speaks rhetoric, but if its outsize demands did not continually challenge the characters in the play there would be no play. And there is a powerful play — one with wider implications for life at present in England than grows out of either of the others.

*ROOTS* is about a Norfolk family of farm laborers, the Bryants, bedded in routine, inarticulate, existing in a mean repetitive round of gossip — dead to any world beyond their own flat fenland horizon. Back to this family comes Beatie Bryant, the daughter, who works as a waitress in London where for three years she has been living with Ronnie Kahn. Everybody expects him to marry her and so does she. Toward the end of her two-week holiday Ronnie is to come and meet her family.

Beatie doesn't return home as a simple country girl: for three years Ronnie has been trying to change her, to rouse her from her rural doze, to make her talk, listen to music, open her mind, get concerned with the politics that run our lives, to wake up and live. He hasn't quite managed, but he has succeeded in giving her an agonizing conscience about her mental and spiritual torpor. Now that she arrives home and finds herself slipping back naturally into the old ways of speech and idolence, she turns her self-criticism, or rather Ronnie's criticism of her, onto her family.

Here the insistent rhetoric is under


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control: Ronnie speaks only through Beatie, as she quotes and mimics him, in more or less, but less and less, humorous demonstrations:

> "You can't learn how to live overnight. *I* don't even know," he say, "and half the world don't know but we got to try. Try," he say, "'cos we're still suffering from the shock of two world wars and we don't know it. Talk," he say, "and look and listen and think and ask questions." But Jesus! I don't know what questions to ask or *how* to talk. . . .

Ronnie sounds like a pain in the neck, but the whole tension of the play lies between his demands for vitality in people, for responsibility, open-mindedness and alertness, and the inadequacy of these country people to supply them or even to understand what they're all about. The growing apprehension of Ronnie's arrival and of his disgust when he sees what Beatie's family are like, what sleepy creatures they are, and the consequences for her, focuses our own exasperation on the dull, grim, spiritless round of this country existence.

When it becomes clear that the very mental stagnation Beatie has inherited is the main cause of Ronnie's jilting her, the conscience he has planted in her makes one wounded effort and wakes her up: she finds herself "talking"—in sheer rage at her family for having, as she supposes, lost her "the best thing" she ever had. Hers is a tirade against rural stupor and the degrading soporific commercial trash it laps up and encourages by lapping up. Ronnie's rhetoric has taken over. We now face an open journalistic assault of sentiments which Wesker has published elsewhere, outside drama, urging action against the huge ruminant sleep of the English working class. The play contains Beatie's outburst up to the moment where suddenly she hears herself and utters the last words exultantly: "God in heaven, RONNIE! It does work, it's happening to me, I can feel it's happened, I'm beginning, on my own two feet—I'm beginning. . . ."

In this finale Wesker is not merely demonstrating the "personal" method, but turning it directly on us—the moment when his critics hunch their shoulders.

IT OUGHT to be remembered, though, that these plays are not intended to be relaxation for a super-sophisticated audience. Wesker's ambition, I take it, his "socialism," consists of trying to raise the cultural standards of the working class and to open their minds. His rhetoric, his message, is aimed at a presumably resistant working-class public. The marvel is that, with such aims, he has been able to produce a realistic drama which is for the most part so pure and moving.

In this concern with the working class and in this direct propagandist appeal to them, *Chicken Soup With Barley* invites comparison with Odets' *Awake And Sing*. This immediately points up not only the solidity of Wesker's work, the complexity and truth of it, but also the comparatively permanent quality of its "message."

Superficially the similarities between the two plays are striking: the poor Jewish family during the depression, the dominant mother, the weak father, the tough-minded sister who gets married, the hopeful son, the cloud of Communist dreams. Beyond that, and in everything that matters, they are unalike.

First of all, in the treatment of politics, the cloud of dreams in *Awake And Sing* seems to be within the author's head: his play is straight political propaganda, sucking us into the cloud, impressing us with the horrifying complacent voracity of the capitalist Morty and with the pathetic sufferings of the impoverished Berger family. The play replaces a political speech with little more subtlety than the same author's *Waiting For Lefty*, which ends beseeching all the listeners to "STRIKE! STRIKE! STRIKE!" *Chicken Soup With Barley*, on the other hand, in its dealings with politics, is a purely historical play: the cloud of Communist dreams is within the heads of the characters, and we see it blow off toward Russia, leaving them all drafty and emptied.

The difference between the plays in this matter of politics is that between a man expressing his own excited opinion and a man creating a world of people full of changing opinions. In *Awake And Sing*, Morty's attitude to life, and Jacob's and Joe's—the only characters who do have an attitude to life—are gathered up into the politics of Marx: gathered up, that is, into the play's political propaganda. Otherwise, the play is morally neutral. *Chicken Soup*, however, gathers the whole of itself into Sarah Kahn's passionate warning: "If you don't care you'll die." *Awake And Sing's* propaganda turns out to be a very temporary political opinion; *Chicken Soup's* turns out to be a permanently true and urgent statement about life. And this illustrates the difference between the socialism of Odets and that of Wesker: Wesker's is something close to a poetic intuition, a concern with the life at the root of all parties and opinions.



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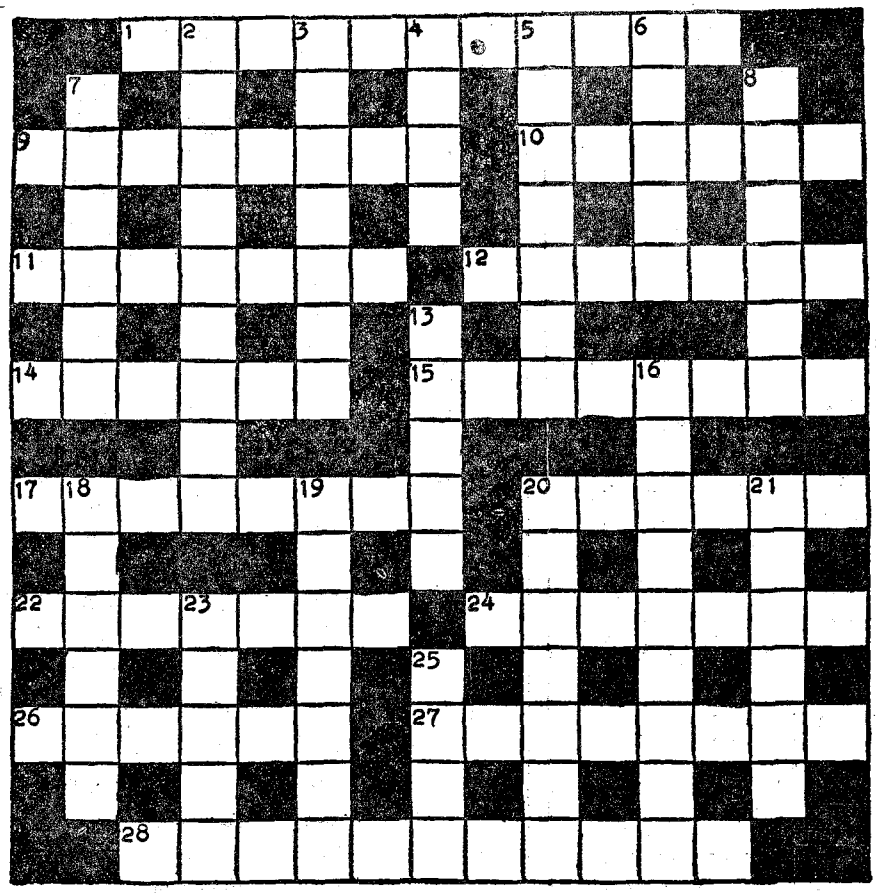
# Crossword Puzzle No. 890

By FRANK W. LEWIS



## ACROSS:

1 A thickened mass one man fabricates for security on the line. (11)
9 What the winner of the race turns in—and how! (8)
10 Once important in the play of a number of Romans with the son of Isis. (6)
11 An oyster might suggest how to stem the flow. (7)
12 Hardly a time for amusement, for the real accompaniment to amusement is uncertain. (7)
14 Concedes something to be fit, but not exactly by design. (6)
15 They might constitute a few words of introduction. (8)
17 These are refined in taste. (8)
20 In the course, perhaps, of stroke prevention. (6)
22 Proving oil is mixed with many a sort of balm? (7)
24 But uniformed servants are not necessarily so impolite. (7)
26 See 5 down
27 Granny is not so good a security risk! (4, 4)
28 Certainly not a valuable quality. (11)

## DOWN:

2 Does being dull make a bad girl cheat so? (9)
3 See 16 down
4 and 25 down Watches some products of mine in unpleasant surroundings. (8)
5 and 26 across Just imagine where your bets might be placed, and you should find its prospects pleasing. (7, 6)
6 Cervantes said marriage is one. (5)
7 Somewhat less than a famous manner, the extremes of 9 might be next. (6)
8 If this clergyman were given a brief account at first, it should be true. (6)
13 Fit in a short and sudden manner. (5)
16 and 3 down A close comparison might imply the takers have a lack of understanding. (2, 5, 2, 7)
18 Your friend with the hat looks rather peaked! (6)
19 When we learn the hard way, a fine part of library service may be missed by it. (7)
20 The business of being worried? (7)
21 Noised about as one with an inventive mind. (6)
23 I'm sad and disturbed, as one with a peculiar touch of it. (5)
25 See 4 down

### SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 889

ACROSS: 8 Concealed weapon; 10 Stipends; 11 and 12 down Snow White; 13 Obligatory; 15 Addicts; 16 Bargain; 19 Scientific; 21 Teem; 22 Especial; 24 Repeat; 26 Cool as a cucumber. DOWN: 1 Command decision; 2 Scan; 3 Passport; 4 Weasels; 5 Owning; 6 and 9 Make amends; 7 Borderline cases; 14 Tight; 17 Accuracy; 18 Afflict; 20 Thirst; 23 Eels; 25 Pump.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